

Harry Ivyleafe Chevalier

Isle of Wight Country Press – 9 September 1933

YARMOUTH SEA MYSTERY SOLVED.

VISITOR FOUND DROWNED.

“LOSS OF MEANS AND HOPE.”

Last week's mystery arising from the disappearance of a Yarmouth visitor after rowing a dinghy to Colwell Bar was cleared up at Thursday's inquest on the body of Harry Ivyleafe Chevalier, aged 54, which was found floating in the Western Solent off Newtown on the previous afternoon. Strapped to the ankles of the deceased were two flat-irons, weighing about 14lb., which he had borrowed from his lodgings, saying he wanted them to press some botanical specimens which he was collecting. It transpired that deceased was a married man formerly holding a good position as an accountant, but that misfortune and ill-health had overtaken him and he had latterly been in the habit of moving from place to place, with no fixed abode and no occupation. His latest itinerary brought him to the Island, possibly because in his early days his family resided here. It was stated that he was last in business at Swanage some five years ago.

The inquest was held at the Town-hall, Yarmouth, by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.), deceased's sister and other relatives being present in addition to P.S. A. Turner, who was in charge of the case.

Cecil Leonard Chiverton, skipper of the yacht Marama, owned by Lord Forster, of Lepe House, Exbury, Hants, deposed that at about 12.15 on the 5th inst. the yacht was proceeding from Lepe to the Needles when, as he approached Newtown-creek he saw the body of a man in the water. It was decomposed and he secured it to the stern of the yacht and towed it to Yarmouth and gave information to the police.

Mary Ann Bright, licensee of the Wheatsheaf Hotel, Yarmouth, stated that at about 7.30 on Saturday, the 19th ult., deceased came to the hotel and asked for bed and breakfast. On the following day he said he should like to stay there for a few days longer and as she could not provide him with a bed it was arranged that he should have rooms with Mrs. Bull close by. She told him he might have his food and bath at the hotel and asked him to sign the hotel register. Although he did not absolutely refuse to do so or to give his name and address he made some excuse for not doing it each of several times that she asked him to sign the register. He did not sign the register during the time he was there. After stopping a week he said he should be leaving on the following day. On Sunday, August 27th, she asked if he was going and he said he would wait until the following morning as he wanted to phone. No letter or telegram came to the hotel for him; she supposed he went to the Post-office to collect any postal communication. On Monday, the 28th ult., he had tea at 6.30 and about 7 o'clock he went to Mrs. Bull's house just across the road. He returned later and said he would like a Guinness, a thing he had never done before – he was a most sober man. He was then carrying a brown paper parcel which he had brought from his lodgings. He had the Guinness and some biscuits. He said he had enjoyed the Guinness very much and should like another for his dinner when he came back, instead of the half pint of ale he usually had. He then went away with the parcel towards Yar-bridge and that was the last she saw of him. – Q. As far as you know he intended to come back? – Yes, as far as I know. We were waiting for him at about 10.30 when he rang up on the phone from Colwell Bay Inn saying “I am ringing up because I thought you might worry about me because I have not come home. I am all right. I am at Colwell Bay, and I shall not be late home. I am coming back by boat.” They impressed upon him all they could not to return by boat at that time of night but he insisted upon doing so. Later they rang up Mr. Nutty at the Colwell Bay Inn to make inquiries and to try to dissuade deceased from rowing back, but by that time he had gone. – Q. Was there anything in his manner to make you suspect that he was contemplating self-destruction? – No, sir; he was very quiet and there was nothing in his manner which would lead to any suspicion at all. He was constantly writing at the meal table. Deceased did not appear to be a strong man; he had the best of food as well as digestive biscuits, but did not eat much meat. She should have thought that he would be about 60 years old. He was very round-shouldered. He came in every morning for his bath and was very particular in all his ways and thoroughly well behaved. He wore a light Norfolk jacket, tweed trousers, and a cap, and had a mackintosh. She had heard it said that he was worried because he could not pay his bill, which was very false as no bill had been presented to him and no money matter had been discussed. There was no

conversation between them as to the payment of his bill. When he asked what her charge would be she told him and he said that was all right. He said he was very comfortable. She should not think of giving a gentleman his bill before he was going.

The Coroner: I have heard no suggestion of that character.

Witness: It is rather unpleasant to have these things said.

Emily Louisa Bull, wife of Ernest Bull, of 3 Bridge-road, Yarmouth, told the Coroner that on the 18th ult. the previous witness sent deceased to her place for a bed. He looked tired and worried, but seemed to pick up afterwards. She talked to him in the morning when he had tea, and he seemed greatly interested in the ships. On the following Wednesday morning he asked if she could lend him some weights to press some specimen plants which he had in a book. She had no weights but lent him two of her heaviest flat-irons – weighing about 7lb. each. There were no straps attached to them and she did not think he got from the house the straps found upon him when the body was recovered. On Thursday he seemed to get a little fidgety, nervous, and agitated in his manner, and occasionally she saw paper scattered about the floor of the room. Once she found a clasp knife under his bedspread, which she thought rather extraordinary. – Q. it suggested that he was rather disturbed in his mind? – I did not know what to think. At about 5.30 p.m. on August 28th he was not in his bed-room when she left the house, and on her return at 9 o'clock she received the information that he was still out. Next morning she found that the flat-irons she had lent deceased were missing from the window sill. – By P.S. Turner: She recognised the shoes produced, as she cleaned them every day. She saw P.S. Turner find an addressed envelope and telegraphic envelope amongst deceased's belongings. She gathered that deceased had spent rather restless nights on the last two days. He complained that the seagulls had disturbed him. She told him he looked a little better for his stay; he did not look so tired. He said he was glad to hear her say that.

Frank Seymour Nutty, manager of the Colwell Bay Inn, said that on the evening of the 28th ult. he saw deceased come into the bar and ask for bread and cheese. He said he had just had a hard row from Yarmouth and had had a rather bad passage; he felt a bit shaky and would like to stop a little while. He was served with refreshment and at 10 o'clock asked if he could stay a little longer as he still felt rather bad. He asked permission to telephone to the Wheatsheaf in Yarmouth to explain where he was as otherwise they would be worrying about him. He then asked witness for another drink, which was refused, and he was given a small bottle containing water. Deceased told witness he intended to row back to Yarmouth. Shortly after witness received a phone message from the Wheatsheaf asking him to stop deceased from rowing back. Deceased had then left and witness proceeded to the beach where he found that three Boy Scouts had just assisted in pushing off the boat with deceased in it. Witness could see the outline of a small boat 20 to 30 yards out from the beach. He and the others there shouted to deceased to return. Deceased must have heard their shouts but they got no reply and the boat went away. He arranged with the coastguard to telephone any news of the progress of the boat to Yarmouth as they were sitting up late at the Wheatsheaf waiting for news.

P.S. A. Turner said that as a result of the report that deceased was missing from his lodgings he found that he had taken a boat from Yarmouth Harbour and had gone to Colwell Bay and had not returned. The boat drifted empty into Yarmouth next day. At deceased's lodgings he found an envelope addressed to his sister, Miss Muriel Chevalier, and an empty telegraphic envelope. Among other documents he found was a type-written copy of familiar words often used as a prayer in church commencing "O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life." Owing to the condition of the body through being in the water so long it was not capable of identification except by a mark on the clothing, which had been identified by Miss Chevalier as belonging to deceased. The body had upon it grey trousers, a shirt bearing the marking identified by Miss Chevalier, and strapped to the ankles were the two flat-irons identified by Mrs. Bull. It had come to his knowledge that on August 28th deceased received a telegraphic order for 10s.

Miss Muriel Ada Vine Chevalier, sister of deceased, residing at Chipperfield, Kings Langley, Hertfordshire, said deceased was 54. He was formerly in a good position as an accountant. She had not seen him since the early summer of 1930; when he had a nervous breakdown and was in hospital for about two months, during which she visited him two or three times. Since then she had been in occasional communication with him by letter, and had occasionally helped him. – Q. He had led a rather precarious life since then, moving about from place to place? – Yes, since the time of his breakdown, and he had not been

able to take work. He has been assisted by myself and others. I rendered him such assistance as my means would allow. – Q. He once enjoyed a rather lucrative living? – Some years ago. She got a letter from him while he was staying at Yarmouth stating that he had visited their mother's grave for the first time since her death, and had taken several walks which they both knew. He added that he wanted to stay at Yarmouth a little longer and asked her to help him. The bill which he said would be owing was a little more than they had been in the habit of sending. She wired him some cash to go on with on the 28th ult. and wrote a letter telling him that other money would be coming in a day or two. She thought that letter must have arrived on the Tuesday morning (August 29th) – too late. Deceased used to say his life was rather objectless but she had never heard that he had threatened to commit suicide. Deceased had not had any fixed abode for some time.

P.S. Turner said he had gathered that deceased had cashed the money order wired him by his sister on the 28th ult. and there was no question of difficulty arising then about means as he had money.

The Coroner said it must be very obvious that the unfortunate man had committed suicide; evidence as to the flat-irons was the most conclusive proof they could possibly imagine. He need not dwell on the sad story of deceased's latter years. Whether his fatal act was the result of sudden impulse he could hardly say – he did not think it was – as it would appear that the thought of suicide must have been in his mind when he borrowed the flat-irons. This was a case of a man who had been well off with a relatively large income, down to the time when misfortune came upon him and, like others, lost his employment, gradually lost his means, and then lost hope and sank gradually into a morbid condition in which he yielded to the impulse to commit suicide. He returned a verdict that deceased committed suicide on August 28th by drowning himself, and that he was temporarily of unsound mind. He expressed his great sympathy with the relatives in that unfortunate circumstance.

Transcription by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries, © 2020
<https://www.foncc.org.uk>