

Robert Croucher

James McDine

and

William George Edward Snow

(the loss of the Steam Launch, Medina)

Portsmouth Evening News - 16 May 1878

THE FATAL LAUNCH ACCIDENT. – With reference to the sad disaster which occurred just outside the harbour yesterday afternoon, we have ascertained that the vessel was a steam barge called the Medina, a vessel of about 25 tons, and fitted with an engine of 15-horse power. She left Portsmouth for Cowes with a cargo of casks and other merchandise, for the Isle of Wight. The wind was blowing strongly in squalls, and the Medina was so heavily laden that a spectator who witnessed her departure remarked that she would never get across. On board the vessel were Robert Croucher, the captain, the engineer, named Medwyne*, a man named Henry Vassey, and a boy **. When off Gilkicker Point, at a short distance from Gosport, she was caught by a squall, and being unable to take in sail she capsized. Vassey succeeded in getting into a boat, and implored his companions, who were clinging to the vessel, to follow his example, but they were either unable or unwilling to do so, and the Medina went down carrying Croucher, Medwyne, and the boy with her. Vassey succeeded in reaching the shore in the boat. Croucher leaves a wife and five children.

From other reports (below):

* ‘the engineer, named Medwyne’ appears to have been James McDine aged 16 – buried at Carisbrooke Cemetery.

**, ‘the boy’ appears to have been William George Edward Snow aged 15 – buried at St Paul’s Old (churchyard) Cemetery.

Hampshire Advertiser – 22 May 1878

THE LATE DISASTER IN STOKES BAY. – An inquest on the body of Robert Croucher, aged 33 years, one of the poor men drowned by the capsizing of the steam barge Medina, in Stokes Bay, on Wednesday, last week, was opened before Mr. Edgar Goble, coroner, at the Sir Charles Napier, Alverstoke Village, on Thursday afternoon. – The Coroner explained that this inquiry would be only preliminary, as in all probability the other two bodies would be recovered, and he thought, therefore, that the best course to pursue would be simply to identify the body, and then adjourn to some future day. – Robert Croucher, father of deceased, then identified the body as that of his son, Robert Croucher, a married man with four children, living at No. 3, Quay-street, Newport, Isle of Wight. – After some further remarks, the inquest was adjourned until Tuesday, the 28th instant.

Isle of Wight Observer – 25 May 1878

FUNERAL OF MR. ROBERT CROUCHER, JUN. – On Sunday afternoon the remains of Mr. Robert Croucher, jun., master of the Medina, which went down in Stokes Bay last Wednesday week, were buried in Newport Cemetery. In the long train which followed the bier the Yarborough Lodge of Odd Fellows, of which deceased was a member, was represented; also the Ancient Order of Foresters. Mr. F. Trestrail, Baptist minister, officiated, and delivered an address. There was a large number of persons congregated in the cemetery.

Portsmouth Evening News – 28 May 1878

THE FOUNDERING OF THE MEDINA NEAR SPITHEAD.

INQUEST YESTERDAY.

An inquest was held by the Coroner (W.H. Garrington, Esq.,) yesterday evening, at the Cricketer's Tavern, Castle-road, Southsea, on the body of James McDine, which was found lying on the Southsea Beach yesterday morning.

Harriett McDine, of South Mall, Newport, Isle of Wight, identified the body by the clothing which it had on, as that of her son, who was between 15 and 16 years of age. He was employed as stoker and engine driver on board of the Medina, a steam launch, belonging to Cowes. The deceased left home on the 14th of May, to go on board the Medina.

Henry Vasey, a mariner, living at Sea-street, Newport, stated that he went on board the Madina at Newport Quay, on 14th inst. By permission of the master, Robert Croucher, he was to have a free passage to Portsmouth, in return for his assistance in the navigation of the vessel, which was employed in carrying a general cargo to and from Portsmouth, Newport, and Cowes. When they left Newport there were five persons on board – the captain, witness and three boys. In the passage across the vessel behaved well, but he could not tell whether she was seaworthy as the water was calm. There was a gentle breeze, and they did not use the engine, but sailed across. She was loaded the same night in the Camber with about 15 tons of potatoes, which were placed in the hold together with some sides of bacon, and five or six casks of paraffin oil. On the deck a chest of drawers and nine casks of beer were lashed. On the following morning, about ten o'clock, they started on their return journey, the weather at the time being very squally, and, in the opinion of witness, not fit for the vessel to go out in. One of the boys who came over with them the previous day refused to return in consequence of the boisterous weather. When they left Portsmouth the crew consisted of the captain, witness, the deceased and a boy named Snow. Steam was got up, and the sails were set, a reef being taken in the main and mizzen sails. The wind was blowing from the S.W., which was as foul a wind as they could possibly have in going over to Newport. The captain was at the helm, and after having made three tacks the fore-hatch was washed overboard. When they were off Gillkicker Point, the vessel shipped a considerable quantity of water, which caused her to sink deeper into the water, and she became unmanageable. Witness then advised the captain to endeavour to return to Portsmouth, but he refused to do so, saying that it would be more dangerous to return than to proceed on the voyage. The weather continued to get worse, and all three of the sails were lowered by witness in accordance with the captain's directions, but the fore and mizzen sails were hoisted again as the vessel was so heavy in the water. As witness found that the vessel was sinking he got into a boat which was being towed astern, and then the painter broke, and the boat drifted a short distance from the vessel which sank almost

immediately afterwards with the captain and the two boys. He saw the captain struggling in the water trying to reach the boat, but witness could not render any assistance as he had no oars or anything with which he might propel the boat, which drifted on to the beach where he landed in safety about an hour afterwards. In his opinion, the cause of accident was by the fore-hatch being carried away, and the water getting into the hold. The hatch was not fastened but had the chain cable placed on the top of it. This, however, soon rolled off by the lurching of the vessel. In order to prevent the water washing down the hatchway after the hatch was carried away, witness, by the captain's direction, placed two sacks and the mainsail cover over the hatchway, and placed the cable on top of them. This, however, proved little use, as it was soon washed away and water was shipped in large quantities.

By the Foreman: Was the vessel a fit one to cross the Solent in rough weather ?

Witness: No, she was not.

A Juror: When did you first discover that the hatch was not properly fastened ?

Witness: I did not observe it before it was washed away.

William Lupton, manager to Messrs. Holdron and Co., drapers, of Lake-road, stated that he was walking upon the beach about half-past five yesterday morning, and when about fifty yards from Newnham's boathouse he saw the body of a man lying at the edge of the water. He hailed a gentleman who was passing on horseback, and asked him to communicate with the police. He remained there until they arrived, when the body was removed by them.

The Coroner, in summing up, said that it did not appear to him that the captain was in any way to blame, as he appeared to have every confidence in his own ability, and also in his vessel, and did all in his power to ensure her safety.

After a brief consultation, the jury returned a verdict to the effect that "The deceased was accidentally drowned by the foundering of the Medina."

Portsmouth Evening News – 29 May 1878

THE FOUNDERING OF THE MEDINA. – The adjourned inquest on the body of Robert William Croucher, the master of the vessel, was held at the Sir Charles Napier, Stoke-road, Gosport, yesterday afternoon, by Edgar Goble, Esq., the county coroner. – Arthur Greenaway, commissioned boatman of coastguards, at Stokes Bay, stated that on the morning of the 15th inst., the watchman called the crew when the Medina was sinking, but they did not put off in their boat, which was nearly a mile from the spot where the survivor landed. Witness afterwards saw a man floating upon a small hatch about half a mile out to sea. When the man approached the shore on the hatch witness and another man stripped, and agreed as soon as an opportunity afforded to render the man assistance. They stood just in the water waiting for the man to approach. The surf was too heavy for anyone to enter the water. As the hatch neared the shore it gave a lurch, the man fell off, threw up his arms, and sank. The man who was seen on the hatch was very like the body which was subsequently recovered, and identified as the master of the vessel. The sea was too high for any boat on the beach to be launched to go to the assistance of the man. Mr. Edwin Wedge, chief boatman in charge of Stokes Bay Coastguard-station, said he saw the vessel capsize. He at once ordered the Coastguard crew on to the beach with the intention of launching a boat, but he found the surf too heavy for him to attempt it. He saw a boat leave the spot where the launch had sunk, and ordered two men to provide themselves with life-belts,

and proceed to the spot towards where the boat was drifting to assist the men in landing. He did not see the man floating on the hatch, as he had gone to see a body which had washed ashore from the Eurydice. The boat's painter was here produced, and it was evident that it had broken and not cut. Mr. Croucher, the father of the deceased stated that there were two ropes to the boat, but Mr. Wedge said there was only one attached to the boat when it came ashore. – Philip Taylor, a lad, stated that on the 15th inst. he saw the body of a man floating ashore, and gave information to the Coastguardsmen. – Henry Vasey, the survivor, was then called and gave evidence similar to that which he did before the Borough Coroner (W.H. Garrington, Esq.), and which appeared in yesterday's issue. – The Coroner, in summing up, stated that at first it appeared strange that the coastguard did not launch a boat, but the omission had been satisfactorily explained by the chief officer, as no boat which was on the beach could have lived in the surf, and it was undesirable to risk further life. He was sure had the coastguard been able they would have been most willing to have saved the lives of the crew. – The jury concurred in this opinion, and returned a verdict of "Accidental death."

Isle of Wight Times – 30 May 1878

Local and District News

THE LATE FATAL ACCIDENT OFF STOKES BAY. – The death of Mr. Robert Croucher (who was drowned on Wednesday, 15th, by the foundering of the Medina) has awakened a very deep and wide spread sympathy for his bereaved widow and four fatherless children, who, by this sad calamity are plunged into the greatest distress. Few men in his position of life were more respected; this was significantly shown by the crowds that followed his remains to the grave. It has been suggested by several of his friends that an effort should at once be made to assist the widow, who is left without any provision whatever. The death of two children, the protracted illness of the youngest (only just now recovered,) and her own frequent attacks of nervous disorder and prolonged suffering from heart disease, confining her to her bed for nearly a year, and the sudden death of her husband at the early age of 33, have so utterly prostrated her, as to awaken apprehensions as to her surviving these repeated and severe trials. The following friends of the family will thankfully receive the donations of any who may be moved to help this bereaved widow and family. – At Ryde: Messrs. Curtis and Son, 1 and 2 Esplanade; Cowes: Mr. E. Boyce, High Street, Mr. H. Shepard, High Street; Ventnor: Mr. J. Croucher; Newport: Rev. F. Trestrail, Messrs. Jing, Bros., High Street, and J.E. Snellgrove; Portsmouth: Mr. Cook, merchant, Town Quay, Messrs. Curtis and Son, Broad Street.

Isle of Wight Observer – 8 June 1878

Newport

THE LOSS OF THE NEWPORT STEAM LAUNCH. – INQUEST OF THE BOY. – On Friday, an inquest was held at the Sloop Inn, Wooton, by F. Blake, Esq., Coroner of the Isle of Wight, touching the death of William George Edward Snow, a boy who was employed on the Medina, steam launch, when she foundered in Stokes Bay on 15th ult. – James Snow, labourer, deposed that he lived at Barton's Village, near Newport. He had seen the body just viewed by the jury, and identified it as that of his son. He could identify the body by the clothes and the boots, and he had not the slightest doubt that it was the body of his son, who would have been 15 years of age on 13th of August next. He last saw him alive on the 14th of May. He was then at home, but was going on board the Medina, which

was to leave Newport that day for Portsmouth. The Medina was a steam trading vessel, and his son had been employed on her about six or eight months, and Mr. Robert Croucher was the master of her all that time. They made the voyage to Portsmouth and back two or three times a week. After leaving on the 14th he expected his son home again on the 15th. – Henry Vasey, mariner, of Newport was then sworn, and gave a detailed account of the casualty already reported in these columns, adding that he thought the vessel was too heavily laden for the weather which prevailed on the 15th, when she went down, but that the cargo would not have been too heavy for the weather existing at the time the cargo was taken aboard. She went down on her side, and was still steaming when she sank. – George South, of Woodside, deposed that on the previous day (Thursday), he was informed that there was a body on the shore near Woodsted, and on going to the place he saw the body that had just been viewed. It was on the beach and out of the water, but it was below high water mark. With the assistance of the Coastguard men the body was removed to the Sloop Inn. – The coroner having briefly addressed the jury, a verdict of “Accidentally drowned” was returned.

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