

Winifred Nellie McPhail

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FATAL CYCLING ACCIDENT AT NEWPORT

LITTLE GIRL VICTIM.

At the Guildhall, Newport, yesterday (Friday), F.A. Joyce, Esq. (deputy coroner), sitting with a jury, of whom Mr. A. Girling was foreman, inquired into the sad circumstances of the death of Winifred Nellie McPhail, aged 6 1/2, daughter of Mr. John McPhail, of 20 Victoria-road, Newport, who was riding on the top bar of her father's pedal bicycle, on Wednesday, was involved in a collision with a bus on the Staplers-road. The proprietors of the bus (Messrs. Hayles and Vanner, of 12a John-street, Ryde) and the driver, Mr. Gordon Rutherford, of 28 Victoria-road, Newport, were represented by Mr. H.E. Stratton. Insp. H. Randall was present on behalf of the police, and Insp. J. Evans for the local branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

John McPhail, labourer, said he was riding his pedal bicycle in Staplers-road, up the hill towards St Paul's Church, about 4 o'clock on Wednesday. His daughter was sitting sideways on the cross-bar of the machine, facing the near side of the road. After getting beyond the small easy right-hand bend of the road he saw a bus coming towards him from the direction of the church. He was riding very slowly up the road. The bus was about 30 yards from him when he first saw it, and when he next saw it he was right head-on to it. The bus was on the correct side of the road and witness was in about the centre. When he got near the bus he tried hard to pull over to the left side of the road, but with the weight on the child on his arms he could not do so properly. The child was supported by his arms and was holding the handle-bars of the bicycle; she was in the centre of the handle-bars. He found he could not turn the wheel, although he tried hard to pull out of the way of the bus. He thought the child became alarmed and that he may have been prevented from pulling over by her holding too tightly on the handle-bars. There was no defect in the machine. The bus knocked them both to the ground. After the accident he found that the child was bleeding from the mouth and she was placed in the bus and taken to Dr Stratton's surgery. He had taken his boy out hundreds of times on the bicycle, but that was the first time he had taken the girl for a ride. He did not know if the bus had reduced speed before it came on to them. He apparently struck the bus and the child was in the centre of the road underneath it. – The Coroner: In fairness to the bus driver, he must have stopped very quickly. – Mr. Stratton (to the witness): The child was picked up just behind the driver's seat ? – Yes. – Q. When you were trying to pull your bicycle to the left side of the road, you found you could not move it. I believe it skidded ? – It did not skid. – Q. If the steering wedged you fell over to the right and the bicycle to the left ? – Q. If the steering wedged you fell over to the right and the bicycle to the left ? – Yes. – The Coroner: Is the bicycle damaged ? – I don't know. – Mr. Stratton: I believe you informed the driver that he need not worry about it, as he was not to blame in any way ? – The words I used were "I don't think he was to blame."

Frederick Henry Barnes, labourer, of 2 Bedworth-place, Ryde, deposed that he was riding on the near side of the Supreme bus, which was travelling very slowly. He saw the cyclist coming up the hill, just below the church; he was then a few yards from the bus. The bicycle touched the side of the bus, and the man fell off, and the child was thrown underneath the vehicle. The child was sitting on the top bar of the bicycle. It seemed as if the man lost control of the handle-bars. The cyclist, who was in the middle of the road, was wobbling about in zig-zag fashion before the accident.

Miss Kathleen Ward, domestic servant, residing at 3 Pitt-street, Swanmore, Ryde, said she was a passenger in the bus from Ryde to Newport. She occupied the third seat from the front, on the offside, and had a good view of the road. When passing St. Paul's Church she saw the cyclist coming up the hill towards the bus, with a little girl seated on the top bar of the bicycle. She saw the cyclist wobble. The child seemed to lean on his arm, and the man fell one way and the child the other. There was plenty of room for the cyclist to pass.

Gordon Rutherford stated that he was a bus driver in the employ of the Supreme Bus Co., residing at 28 Victoria-street, Newport, and had been engaged in bus work for nearly 10 years. On Wednesday he drove a bus from Ryde to Newport with 8 or 10 passengers. After passing the four cross-roads near St. Paul's Church he saw a man and a child on a bicycle. The first time he took any notice of them they were about 15 to 29 yards away, coming in his direction. He was driving on the near side at an estimated speed of 10 to 15 miles per hour. The cyclist was right on the crown of the road and appeared to be quite all right. He saw the rider wobble when abreast of him and pitch towards the offside, bringing the girl down with him. The bicycle went well away from the bus, but the man struck it. It would have been very easy for the man to get away if he had speed enough; he thought it was lack of speed that caused him to wobble. He did not know whether the child slipped and seized the handle-bars, but it was conceivable that that might have happened. The bus was stopped immediately. He slowed up at the cross-roads, which were very dangerous, as there were always children about there, and went practically dead slow all the way from the church until the accident happened; it did not need much braking to stop. – Replying to Insp. Randall, Mr. Hayles said the width of the bus was about 5ft. or 6ft. and the weight between two and three tons. It was practically a straight road from St. Paul's Church to where the accident happened.

Mr. McPhail, recalled, said he mounted the bicycle 10 yards from the place where the accident happened. – By the Jury: It was a steady pull up the road. It was difficult to ride a bicycle with a child on the handle-bars and he could not go very fast. – Mr. Stratton (to Rutherford): You did not notice him until he was 15 yards away, and then he was wobbling? – Yes. There was a man on the near side who attracted my attention. The cyclist was going very slowly and I did not think there was anything the matter with him. – Mr. Stratton: He came off his bicycle into you and the bicycle went away from him? – yes. The witness added that McPhail asked him if he was the driver of the bus, and on replying in the affirmative he said "You have nothing to worry about." He also believed, but could not be sure, that McPhail said "You could not possibly avoid it."

Percy Read, bus conductor, of 1 Copse-view, Havenstreet, said he was sitting in the bus, behind the driver. The cyclist wobbled terribly and when abreast of the bus the man and child fell over on the right side of it.

Dr. A.A. Stratton said the child was brought to him at about 4.10 p.m. on Wednesday. She was suffering from concussion and a fractured skull and jaw, the injuries being consistent with having been thrown violently to the ground. There was no sign of any wheel mark. The child died about a quarter of an hour later.

The Coroner said he thought they could quite safely arrive at the conclusion that this was an accident and that the driver was to be exonerated from blame. The witnesses agreed – and the statement of the father indicated the same thing – that he had lost control of the bicycle. It was one of those unfortunate accidents which occurred, and it illustrated the danger of a child being put to ride on the top bar of a bicycle. Even before the advent of motor-cars it was a dangerous thing to do, and that danger had greatly increased.

The jury found that death resulted from a collision between a bus and a bicycle ridden by the father of the deceased, on the horizontal bar of which the latter was riding, her father having lost control of the bicycle before he reached the bus, and they exonerated the driver from blame.

Mr. Stratton, on behalf of the proprietors of the bus, said how very sincerely they sympathised with the family in this very sad affair. It had been very distressing to the driver and the conductor of the bus, because they felt it was entirely due to circumstances over which they had no control whatsoever; they wished him particularly to clear them from any blame and to assure the Court that it was a pure accident.

The jury gave their fees to the family.

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