

Alfred Horatio Sheaf

1911 census, Ship and Launch, Hurstake, River Side, Newport

<i>Alfred Horatio Sheaf</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>Fisherman</i>	<i>Rudmore Portsmouth</i>
Fanny Sheaf	Wife	54		Whippingham, IW
William Henry Sheaf	Son	25	Fish and Fruit Salesman	Whippingham, IW
Hilda Alice Sheaf	Daughter	23		Carisbrooke, IW
Edwin Sheaf	Son	22	Fish and Fruit Salesman	Carisbrooke, IW
Fred Sheaf	Son	21	Fish and Fruit Salesman	Carisbrooke, IW
Francis Robert Walter Sheaf	Son	18	Fish Shop Boy	Carisbrooke, IW
Fanny Louisa Daisy Sheaf	Daughter	13	School	Carisbrooke, IW
Lillian Martha Sheaf	Daughter	11	School	Carisbrooke, IW
Harold Sheaf	Son	6	School	Carisbrooke, IW
Leonard Sheaf	Grand Son	7	School	Carisbrooke, IW
Robert James Carpenter	Boarder	54	Mariner	Carisbrooke, IW

Isle of Wight County Press – 12 February 1921

WELL KNOWN BOATMAN DROWNED.

MIDNIGHT DEATH AT NEWPORT QUAY.

On Wednesday the deputy-coroner (F.A. Joyce, Esq.), held an inquest at the Guildhall, Newport, on the body of Alfred Horatio Sheaf, 65, licensee of the Ship and Launch, Hurstake, a well-known boat proprietor and fisherman, who was found drowned in the Medina at Newport Quay on Tuesday. Mr. F. Prangnell was foreman of the jury.

Ernest John Leal, town foreman, of 61, Carisbrooke-road, Newport, said that at 7.35 a.m. on the 8th inst. his attention was directed to the body of a man lying face downwards in the mud at the Quay. With assistance he got it out. It was that of deceased, fully dressed, excepting his cap.

Alfred Horatio Sheaf, son of the deceased, living at the cottage adjoining the Ship and Launch, Hurstake, and a fisherman, said that on the evening of the 7th inst. he, with his father and Mr. Adams, jun., came in a rowing-boat from Hurstake to the Quay. Witness rowed the boat up. They parted on the Quay, witness and Mr. Adams going away, leaving his father behind, and that was the last they saw of him. Witness walked home, getting home at about 10.30, naturally thinking that his father would take the boat home. Deceased had been in the habit of going up and down the river in a boat for many years, but he could not swim. – By Insp. Sibbeck: He knew nothing about Mr. Adams falling into the water and losing his hat. He (witness) had had enough to drink. – [The Coroner: That generally means more than enough.] He and Adams were refused drink at the first public-house at which they called after leaving the Quay. There was nothing the matter with his father's condition. He did not remember his father giving his hat to Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams came down to Hurstake during the afternoon, and witness rowed him to the Folly, and on returning, they decided to go to Newport in the boat. His father was not in their company except whilst they were going to Newport in the boat. He took Mr. Adams home. Mr. Adams was wet through, but he did not know how to account for it.

Henry William James Adams, of Newport, said he came away with the last witness and his father, and reached the Quay at about 9.30 or 8.45 p.m. He never had such a shock in his life as when he heard that the poor old gentleman was gone. He should like to say that he (the witness) did not fall out of the boat. Instead of stepping on the slipway he stepped into the water, because he did not know the slipway,

and that was how he got wet. He said to the deceased "My hat is gone," and the old gentleman was kind enough to take his own hat off and let him have it. The statement of Mr. Sheaf as to his father's condition was correct – he was absolutely as sober as a judge. – By Insp. Sibbeck: He remembered telling the Inspector next morning that his memory was a blank as to what happened on the previous night; he said that because he did not then know that the old gentleman was gone, and he thought the Inspector was referring to evidence for some proceedings.

Insp. Sibbeck: All I wanted was facts. The Inspector added that Mr. Adams said that his memory was a blank, and that he did not remember getting out of the boat or being refused drink – he did not remember anything. – By the Coroner: He did not know anything about Mr. Sheaf being drowned.

The Coroner: I don't think we need pursue that matter.

Frank Brading, casual labourer, of Hillside-terrace, Newport, said that at about 10.30 on Monday night he passed along the Quay on his way home, and saw a man standing up in what appeared to be one of Sheaf's rowing-boats. The boat was alongside the Corporation mud lighter, which was lying under the south arch of the railway-bridge. He saw the man strike a match, apparently to light his pipe, as he was afterwards smoking. The boat was on the lower side of the lighter, and outside the railway-bridge.

Harry Miller, boot and shoe repairer, Sea-street, Newport, said that just before 10.30 he heard deceased shouting, and thought he was talking to some one on the Quay. It was not a cry for help, as if some one was in difficulty; it was quite a natural voice.

Joseph Henry Johns, chief engineer of the Electric-light works, residing at 44 Quay-street, Newport, said that he left the works at about 10 to 11 on Monday night. On his way home he met a man, whom he did not know at the time, outside the Dolphin. The man, who proved to be deceased, after asking for a bit of tobacco said "Look at the Corporation lighter athwart the stream. I can't get down the river in my boat." He replied that surely deceased did not want to go down the river on a dark night like that, but he said he had been up and down the river and a licensed victualler for 40 years. Deceased was apparently quite sober, but seemed to want some one to pass the time with until a policeman or some one else came to see about the position of the lighter. He said he had twice tried to get by the lighter, but could not do so. Witness asked if he was going fishing, and deceased said yes. He added that he could walk home, but that would not earn his living.

The Coroner said deceased was naturally an obstinate man, and might have thought that the Corporation or their servants had no business to leave the lighter where it was, obstructing the passage-way. There was, however, the main channel under the left hand railway-arch which presumably deceased could have used if not obstructed.

The Foreman said he had never seen that blocked by the lighter.

Mr. A. Chappell (Corporation wharfinger) said the other channel, to which the Coroner had referred, was always open. Nothing could get through the right hand channel except row-boats, and these would be blocked by the lighter.

The witness Miller, recalled, said that the main channel was clear when he heard deceased shouting.

Deceased's son said the main channel was clear when they came up to the Quay.

The Coroner said they need not pursue that point further. Deceased stood up in his boat for some purpose and fell over-board. The state of the wind and tide would account for the body not going down the river, and for the fact that the boat was found near the Ark.

Mr. Chappell said if deceased had fallen overboard when trying to pass the lighter under the right-hand arch neither the body nor the boat would have got below the bridge. He must have gone out in the main channel.

Dr. Dowdall, who examined the body, said it presented the appearance of recent drowning. There were no marks of violence. He should think he had not been dead more than 12 hours.

The Coroner said he thought the circumstances justified a verdict of "Accidentally drowned." It was unfortunate that deceased was obdurate about the alleged obstruction in the river, and one could not dismiss from one's mind the possibility that was how it happened; but the fact remained that if he could not get through on one side he could have gone through on the other, or if that had been hopeless he could have walked home.

The Foreman said the jury had agreed upon a verdict of "Accidentally drowned." They expressed sympathy with the widow and other relatives in their great bereavement.

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