

**Annie Williams**

**Isle of Wight County Press  
30 March 1946**

**BURNING FATALITY AT NEWPORT.**

**CORONER COMMENDS WITNESS.**

Newport residents were shocked to learn on Saturday of the tragic death as the result of a fire at her home of a lady who for many years had been a well known resident, and whose family has long been greatly respected in the town. She was Miss Annie Williams, aged 81, of 17 Coppins Bridge. Her elder sister, Mrs. Emily Cole, who lived with her, suffered severely from shock, but is making good progress at St. Mary's Hospital. The tragedy became known when N.F.S. men found Miss William's charred body on the kitchen floor after an accident with an oil stove. Miss Williams was a sister of the late Mr. H. M. Williams, J.P., and was a clever dressmaker. She was a much-esteemed member of the Newport Congregational Church. In her earlier years she had worked devotedly for the Sunday-school and the P.T.E. Society, and as a member of the choir.

An inquest was held by the Coroner (Mr. R. E. A. Webster) on Thursday, at the Guildhall, Newport. Inspector A. R. Bird represented the police. Mr. F. W. H. Cool was present on behalf of the relatives.- Dr. J. J. Dowdall said death was due to shock from extensive burns, and would have occurred in a few seconds. - Mrs. Emma Wendes stated that she had been a neighbour of the deceased and her sister for some 24 years, and had been in the habit of visiting them frequently. Both ladies were very independent, and would not allow her to do very much for them. Miss Williams was almost blind in one eye and latterly had been unwell, but would not be persuaded to have medical advice, and had even forbidden witness to tell outsiders that she was indisposed. They used a double-burner type of oil stove in their kitchen, and this was usually alight all day. Every morning soon after 8 o'clock she looked to see if smoke was coming from the chimney of No. 17, and if none had appeared by 8.30 she had arranged to go in and see what was wrong. On Saturday she looked as usual and saw smoke coming from the chimney at about 8.10 a.m., and concluded that everything was normal. At about 8.30 a.m. Mrs. Cook, who lives at No. 15, came to see her and told her that she was sure there was a fire at No.17, as her house was full of smoke. Witness met Mrs. Cole coming out of the back door and she said "Find Annie, she is in there." Continuing, witness said "I went into the kitchen as quickly as I could, and found the place blazing fiercely. There was not much smoke; it was mostly flames and it was very hot. I couldn't see her for the flames, and I groped about but was unable to find her." Witness said that another neighbour came in and between them they helped Mrs. Cole out. She had come back to try and find her sister. Witness was unable to make a second attempt to find Miss Williams as the flames were spreading rapidly.

The Coroner: I must congratulate you on what you did. You behaved with great bravery in going into that burning kitchen, and I have pleasure in saying so.- Witness: I should like to thank the firemen for their promptness.- The Coroner: I am sure that is well deserved.

Hector Percy Scott, N.F.S. section leader, said his appliance was on the scene within a minute and a half of the call being received. Someone told him there was an old lady inside, and he immediately entered the house, playing the jet from the hose-reel in front of him. He was met by intense heat, and in the kitchen, through a break in the smoke, he saw the body, with the clothing burning. She was obviously dead, and he sent a messenger to the police. After the fire was out he found the double-burner oil stove near the deceased's feet, a paraffin can, and a funnel minus the stem. It was probable that Miss Williams had been filling the stove with the defective funnel, and had spilt some oil which ignited when she lit the stove.

Column Officer C. R. Russell, N.F.S. officer in charge of the I.W. sub-area, pointed out that a fire was laid in the grate but it had never been lit, so that the smoke which Mrs. Wendes saw must have been caused by the outbreak. He agreed with the Coroner that Mrs. Wendes did a very brave action in going into the burning kitchen without any protection.

Recording a verdict of accidental death the Coroner commented "I should like again to say that Mrs. Wendes is to be congratulated, and that the Fire Service turned out very quickly and did everything that could possibly have been done." - Mr. Cool, on behalf of the relatives, expressed thanks to Mrs. Wendes and other neighbours who gave assistance.

The funeral took place on Wednesday at the Congregational Church, the Rev. T. E. R. Langridge, who officiated, paying sincere tribute to the deceased lady's work for the church. Mr. A. Mearman (organist) played Chopin's Funeral March, "Solemn Melody" (Walford Davies), and "O rest in the Lord" (Mendelssohn.) The mourners were the Rev. F. W. and Mrs. Tilley and Mrs. E. Carter (nephew and nieces), Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. W. Wendes, senior, and Mr. F. W. H. Cool. Others present were Mesdames F. B. Sheaf, E. S. Spanner, E. G. Webster, F. Scott, W. Wendes, junior, E. Willis, J. H. Flux, T. E. R. Langridge, C. White, E. Harris, Bevan, and P. W. Boxall, the Misses M. Cutmore, L. Wheeler, C. Cheverton, W. Morgan, and M. Sanders, Messrs. P. G. Jenkins, T.C. (also representing Miss Young, of Reigate), J. F. Launder, T.C., C. Pragnell (also representing Miss F. E. Pragnell), J. Clarke, and G. Bignell, and Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Whitcher, Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Harrison, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Hayles, and Mrs. and Mrs. Ernest Hazard.

Messrs. H. and F. Damp made the arrangements, and the interment was at Newport Cemetery. Wreaths included one from the neighbours and friends at Coppins Bridge and Fairlee-road.

Transcription by Kate MacDonell for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,  
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