

Alice Gertrude Barton

Portsmouth Evening News - Thursday 14 January 1904

CURIOSITY AND PANIC.

TERRIBLE BURNING CASE AT NEWPORT.

On Wednesday afternoon an inquest was held at the Servants' Home, Broadlands, Newport, on the body of Alice Barton, aged 14, who had been undergoing training as a servant at the Home, and who died as the result of injuries sustained through catching her clothes on fire on the previous Saturday.

Mary Appleby, the Matron, said that on the day following the accident she asked deceased how it happened, and she replied that she went into the sitting-room and the fire being low she put the poker into the grate and left it sticking out. She then stood on the fender to read some papers, which had been left on the mantelpiece. In the meantime the poker had got red-hot, and fell out against the bottom of her frock and apron. The smell of her burning dress first caused her to look down, and she then fled from the room, and would not stop for the other girls to put carpet over her to put out the flames.

Catherine Roffee, kitchen-maid, said deceased came to the kitchen door on fire, and asked her to help her extinguish the flames. Witness tried to do so, and was getting up a carpet to put over her, but before she could so deceased had gone out of the room and was rushing about the back hall with her clothes flaming. Witness ran to the other girls, who started screaming and ran away into another part of the building.

The Deputy Coroner said deceased should have been thrown down and covered over with something to smother the flames instead of being left, but there seemed to have been a panic among the girls.

Elizabeth Scott, the Kitchen Matron, said the deceased was a mass of flames, and witness could not see that it was a human being at all till afterwards. She went and threw the dress round the top part of deceased, and immediately afterwards Smart, the gardener, threw his arms round the girl and got her down, and they smothered the fire as well as they could with pieces of carpet.

P.S. Hutchin, who rushed in on hearing the fire bell ringing, found the deceased in a sitting posture on the floor with the carpet round her, but her clothes were still burning, as the carpet being stiff did not seem to have the desired effect. The Sergeant stripped off his serge jacket and wrapped that round the deceased and then cut off the smouldering garments remaining, with the assistance of Miss Biggs.

Dr. Coombs said deceased was terribly burnt.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned, and sympathy was expressed with the widowed mother and those at the Home, and the Police-Sergeant and Miss Scott were commended.

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