



Death Near The Downs Bishopstone 1881

Death and Inquest of Charles Beckett

On Wednesday night, an old man named **Charles Beckett** lost his way while coming off the downs near Bishopstone, Shrivenham, and was not seen alive again.

Search was made for him the same night, but unsuccessfully. On the search being renewed on Thursday morning by the police, his dead body was found near the Aldbourne Road.

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 22 January 1881

Mr. Baker held an inquest on Saturday, at the True Heart Inn, Bishopstone, on the body of Charles Beckett, aged 58 years, employed by the Earl of Craven at Ashdown House, who was frozen to death on the previous Tuesday. Mr. John Williams was foreman of the jury.

The following evidence was taken:- James Bone said : I live at Ashdown Park, and am head gardener to the Earl of Craven. I identify the body of the deceased as that of Charles Beckett, who lived at Ashdown Park., and was postman to the Earl of Craven's household. On Tuesday, the 18th about half past three, I saw the deceased at Red Barn, in the parish of Ashbury, within a mile of Ashdown. Deceased was going to Ashdown with the letters. He came into the house at Red Barn to deliver a letter and a paper. He said he was so cold he could not get the letter out of his pocket and I got it out for him. The deceased then warmed himself and started for Ashdown with a young man named Fred Hall. Deceased never expressed any doubt about being able to reach Ashdown House.

William Jones Williams said : I am a private gentleman. On Tuesday night the 18th about a quarter to five, I saw the deceased lost between Ridgway and Bishopstone, with another young man. I took them home and gave each half a wine glass full of whisky neat. The night was bitterly cold. We then all started to come to Bishopstone. Hall's hat blew off, and he went after it. In doing so he fell into a drift on his head into a field below. In consequence of this I had to carry him to Bishopstone. The deceased helped me to carry him some distance, when his own hat blew off and he went after it. Deceased let go of Hall and nearly threw me down when he went after his hat. I then lost sight of him, as the snow was so blinding. I heard deceased shout once after that, before I had moved an inch. It sounded like "Where are you ?". I answered "For God's sake come on at once, or we shall all be lost". I neither saw nor heard anything of him after that. I daren't leave the side of the road to look after him. I never stopped shouting all the way to Bishopstone. I sent the policeman to look for him at once. If I had left Hall I should have lost myself and him too.

P.C. Read said : On Tuesday evening, between five and six o'clock, from information I received from Mr Jones Williams. I. In company with Mr. Williams, went in search of the deceased on the hills near

Bishopstone. We went to the place where Mr. Williams said he thought the deceased might be, and we shouted. The weather was so severe that we were nearly exhausted ourselves. On the next morning, as soon as it was light. I got some men and searched the hills. We found two hats, and on the edge of the Folly bank we picked up deceased's walking stick. A little farther on we noticed a roll in the bank, which made it evident something had been down. We got down and searched the bottom. And there found deceased, apparently frozen to death. I am of opinion that he fell down the bank, about 40 yards, and that would account for the bruises on his face.

The following verdict was returned "That deceased accidentally fell down a steep bank and became stunned, and was frozen to death whilst following his employment as a letter carrier".

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 29 January 1881