



SOUTH WILTSHIRE
CORONER'S INQUESTS



CODFORD

George Lye **5th February, 1915**

Death From Exposure

Mr F. A. P. Sylvester, Coroner, held an inquest into at the Codford Railway Station concerning the death of George Lye, who was employed at the Camp, and who had been found dead in a field near the station on Sunday morning.

William Troke said he found Lye, who was drunk, lying in the Station Road just before eleven on Saturday night. He assisted him under a tree and left him. He did not leave anyone with the deceased.

The Coroner: Was he able to speak intelligently? Reply: No, sir.

Is this a common sight in Codford? Reply: Yes, sir (laughter amongst the jury).

The Coroner (to Supt Scott): You had some information that he had come by train? Reply: Yes, sir.

The Coroner: You had satisfied yourself that he had come from Salisbury, and was in that condition when he got here? He was drunk when he got here, because he was ejected from the station? Reply: Yes.

PC Hillier said Lye arrived by the train, which was late, and got to Codford about nine o'clock.

The Coroner: He was in an intoxicated state?

PC Hillier: Yes. He was asked for his ticket.

Supt Scott: He had no ticket and was practically given into custody, but then paid.

Fred W. Knapp, checker for Sir John Jackson, lodging in St Paul's Road, Salisbury, said that on Sunday morning at about nine o'clock, while proceeding from the Codford station in a tractor, he saw a body lying in a field. One of his men got down and said he believed it was a man. Lye was lying by a hayrick. The body was quite stiff. He went for the policeman but found he had gone to Warminster. He then went back and left a representative with the body and fetched Dr Lewis. The body was lying on its right side, and the overcoat was round his arm. His clothes and his face were smothered with mud. There was considerable trouble with the men drinking.

The Coroner: Do you know whether Messrs Jackson have any trouble in getting labour? Can they get labour?
Reply: We can get labour very easily.

They can pick and choose? Reply: That is my experience. Hundreds of men are after work.

There was no weapon or anything lying near deceased? Reply: No.

Dr Lewis said he had examined the body. There were no marks of violence with the exception of a slight cut in the right knee, where Lye had evidently fallen. Death was due to exposure.

The Coroner: What would be the age of the deceased?

Witness: He was a man of between 55 and 60.

PC Hillier said there was 2s 3½d in money and two clay pipes on deceased.

The Coroner: Have Messrs Jackson's men any cards or identification marks?

Supt Scott: They generally carry a working number. In this case there was nothing found on the body.

The Coroner: Do the police have much trouble with drunkenness?

Supt. Scott replied that they have a good deal of trouble. The men went away, especially on Saturday when they went for a week-end, and returned in a drunken state.

The Coroner, in reviewing the case, said he did not think the jury would have any difficulty in arriving at a verdict after hearing the Lye was lying at the side of the road on Saturday night and was not seen again until the following morning. He was apparently in a beastly state and unable to help himself, and so met with a miserable death. They had heard that the man had been seen reeling along the road there and that it was not an uncommon sight, but it was a puzzle, and a very difficult puzzle, to know exactly what could be done to remedy such a state of affairs. He certainly was not the one to suggest what should be done. All he could say was that from what he had heard and seen something should be done. Probably something might be arranged so that every man who was employed at the works could be easily identified, so that the police, who had their hands full enough, should not have to spend a tremendous lot of trouble tearing about to find who the man was when he met with a calamity like that.

Also the Railway Company, and the contractors, if they acted together, ought to invent some system to check that sort of thing. He felt sure it could be done, because they had heard that men did not always get the drink that poisoned them in the village, but that they got it in other places and brought it with them. It should not be beyond the resources of the contractors and Railway Company to invent a system by which that state of things could be checked if not altogether stopped.

The Foreman said the jury were unanimous in their verdict that death was due to exposure, and added that he had thought for a long time that there should be a place where drunken men could be put until they were sober – a sort of lock-up. Very often the men were harmless, and if there was a safe place to put them in for two or three hours until they were sober and out of the way of the drink it would be an advantage to them and the village – that was if they could not be prevented from getting liquor.

The Coroner: I think that is a very good suggestion. I dare say this will get into the Press and those who are responsible will take notice of it.

At the conclusion of the inquiry PS Zebedee said the son of George Lye had arrived. The son was sworn and identified the body as that of his father. He was aged 52 years, was a mason, but had been working at the camp as a labourer. He lived at 17, Corn Street, Bath, and had only been at Codford a week.

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