



SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



CODFORD

William Miles 28th January, 1888

The Shocking Death near Codford

Mr F T Sylvester, Coroner for the district, held an inquest at the waiting room at Codford Station, on Saturday morning, on the body of William Miles, a pensioner and labourer, of Corton, who, was run over by a train on the previous Thursday afternoon. Mr William Dear was chosen as foreman of the jury.

James Miles, aged nineteen, son of the deceased, was the first witness called. He stated that he lived with his father at Corton & that his father enjoyed good health; the witness was not aware that his father was subject to fits. On Thursday afternoon, William Miles was in his usual health when he left home at about two o'clock to attend Mr Chadwick's surgery at Codford, to fetch some medicine for Mrs Doughty, of Corton. The witness, son of the deceased did not know which way his father had gone to Codford, but believed he went by way of the line. Going down the line would save about half a mile & the deceased was accustomed to walking down the line & frequently did so. The witness was not aware that anyone had ever prevented his father from walking down the line. The witness had expected his father home from Codford on the afternoon in question at about four o'clock. His father was sober when he had left home and the witness considered that his father was in his right mind. His father was generally a sober man and he had never seen his father the worse for liquor. The witness had remembered his father had complained of having pain in his hips, but never remembered him having a fit. His father was of a cheerful disposition and appeared to be more cheerful than usual on the day in question. The witness had never known his father to threaten to do himself harm. William Miles had been in the army for twenty one years, having belonged to the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards. The witness had identified the body as that of his father.

Frank Potticary, gardener of Codford, stated that he saw the deceased walking up the line on Thursday afternoon, about 10 minutes past four. The deceased was about 100 yards from the Codford signal box when the Mr Potticary saw him, and he was walking on the footpath in the direction of Upton Lovell crossing. The deceased had a fancy basket in his hand and some bottles in his pocket. He spoke to witness and asked him how he was getting on. Witness put the same question to deceased and the latter replied "Rough." Deceased staggered a little in his walking but whether or not that was from the influence of drink witness did not know. Deceased gave him the impression that he was under the influence of drink, and witness thought that when he said he was getting on "rough" he did so because he had a little beer. Witness did not think that he was incapacitated from taking care of himself. He did not fall about. If deceased had kept to the path any passing train would not have hurt him.

James Miles, son of the deceased was re-called & stated, in answer to the coroner, that his father had been receiving a pension of ten pence per day from the army. The deceased's sight was good, and although a little deaf he could hear what anyone said to him.

Frederick Williams, driver on the GWR, of Bristol, was the next witness. He stated that he was in charge of the passenger train on Thursday afternoon due at Codford at 4.16. The train was just six minutes late, and he was travelling at the rate of between thirty and thirty five miles an hour between Heytesbury and Codford stations. He had the automatic back and brake in use, which was attached to the whole of the train. He could pull up the train from 200 to 250 yards. He saw nothing on the line after he left Heytesbury until just after he had passed the Upton Lovell crossing, when he observed something. He did not recognise the object until taking the second glance, when he saw it was a human form. He was then within seventy or eighty yards of it, and it was impossible for him to pull up before coming into collision with it. Deceased was in a crouching position, being on his knees, with his head between his hands, and his chest over the railway. Witness immediately blew whistles, and as deceased never moved, he at once applied the brakes – both the back one and the brake on the tender, but was unable to pull up until after he had passed over the body. As soon as the train was brought to a standstill, he went back and found that the person was dead. Witness had been a driver for the GWR Company for 14 years, and had frequently seen persons walking on the footpath opposite the line.

Fireman James Mason corroborated the evidence of the last witness.

Gouldsworth Beer, porter of Codford, stated to seeing the deceased on the afternoon in question shortly before four o'clock, passing the Goods Station, going in the direction of Corton. He believed the deceased got on the line at the level crossing. The deceased walked a little stooping, but he did not give the witness the impression that he was under the influence of drink.

District Inspector Forester explained that the officers had no instructions to prevent persons from walking on the line.

The Gouldsworth Beer, porter of Codford, continuing, said that the driver of the train informed him that he had run over a man. Witness having procured some tar sheets and a trolley, proceeded down the line in company with a packer. They first came upon the head and shoulders of deceased, and a little further on they picked up the legs and the other parts of the body. The remains were placed in a tar sheet and brought to the Goods station.

W H Chadwick surgeon, of Codford, said he had examined the remains of the deceased, and found a fracture of the skull, the neck broken, and a scalp wound on the forehead, both arms were also broken at the elbow, and there were other injuries, the whole of which were such as were likely to be caused by being run over by the train. He had seen the deceased before, but was not present when he came to his surgery on Thursday.

PC Hillier, stationed at Codford, said he had made inquiries regarding the quantity of drink the deceased had had. The landlady at the Royal Oak, at Corton, told him that on the morning of Thursday he had two 1½d worth, and a glass out of a quart for dinner. He also called on his way to Codford at the *George Inn* and purchased 1½d worth, and on his return had another 1½d worth. PC Hillier had searched the deceased after his death and found 1½d on him, an old red handkerchief and two bottles smashed.

The Coroner summed up the evidence, and advised the jury, as there was no evidence to show how the deceased came to be on the railway line, to return an open verdict of "Found dead," which was accordingly done.

The remains of the deceased, William Miles, were interred in the graveyard at Heytesbury parish church on Saturday afternoon, the ceremony being performed by the Rev W J Swayne.

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