



Coroner's Inquest Report

Minety

Mr William Goatley Wells MD

On Tuesday morning Mr A J Morton Ball, coroner, held an inquiry at the police court, Cirencester, into the circumstances attending the death of Mr William Goatley Wells MD of Ravenshurst Lodge, Minety, Wilts, which event occurred in a tragic manner on the previous day. The evidence disclosed that deceased was eighty years of age, and had lately been in low and desponding spirits, and though not having threatened self destruction he was heard to say that his death might come sooner than expected.

He took his degree as doctor of medicine many years ago in Edinburgh, but had not practised for a length of time, yet kept a quantity of drugs in his residence.

Mr Wells had long been a client of Messrs Mullings, Ellett, and Co., solicitors, of Park Street, Cirencester, and in response to a letter from the firm he came into the town on Monday in respect of some business relating to property in Cricklade, deceased having formerly been a large landed proprietor in Wiltshire.

Mr Wells started from home of his own free will, and declined to be accompanied by his son, who drove him to Minety railway station and saw nothing peculiar in his demeanour, albeit the doctor bade a couple of men he met on his way "good bye," a kind of salutation they were surprised to hear.

Arriving at the offices of Messrs Mullings, Ellett, and Co., Mr Wells was for some minutes detained before getting an interview with Mr Ellett, the senior partner of the firm. This took place just before one o'clock, and lasted only a short time. Mr Ellett, with whom was Mr F J C Forse, one of the managing clerks, produced the document which awaited Mr Wells' signature to make it complete. At that the more than usually cheerful disposition and manner of the old gentleman became changed, and though he did not fly in a passion, as was not unfrequently the case, he firmly refused to sign the deed, and upon the business interview terminating, Mr Ellett remarked to Dr Wells that his signature was not absolutely indispensable.

Both lawyer and client proceeded to leave the apartment, Dr Wells being in front. As he made for the door it was observed that he passed his hand under his coat to a waistcoat pocket, from which he withdrew a small phial bottle and at a draught drank off the contents, returning the bottle as Mr Forse proceeded to expedite the old man's exit by opening the door. Scarcely had he passed the inner threshold than he was seen to stumble and stagger forward, and Mr Forse, thinking it was the result of a fainting fit after a tonic or restorative, caught Dr Wells in his arms and supported him back to the room.

There he was laid on the floor, and he died in less than twenty minutes and a very few minutes after the arrival of Mr E Cripps, who found the case hopeless and that no medical skill could avail. In the bottle taken from deceased's pocket Mr Cripps found a little liquid and white sediment, which he found to be cyanide of potassium, sufficient to kill four or five persons, and supposing that swallowed by Dr Wels to have been of the same strength he concluded the draught taken was sufficient to kill ten or twelve persons. It was stated that the deceased had been in the habit of taking chlorodyne, and that against its use he had once been cautioned. This was some time ago.

In summing up the Coroner said he saw nothing about the evidence upon which the jury could not form an opinion, for he would not venture to suggest that Dr Wells took the fatal draught in mistake for some other fluid.

The jury returned a verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind," with which finding the Coroner remarked that he perfectly agreed.

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