



CORONERS INQUESTS



John Fryer

Mysterious Disappearance Of A Salisbury Workhouse Inmate

Body Found In A Nunton Water Carrier

The body of John Fryer, an old man who mysteriously disappeared from Salisbury Workhouse nearly a month ago was found in a water carrier near Nunton Bridge on Sunday evening. The old man had evidently crawled through a gap in the hedge, being unconscious of the fact that the water was immediately inside the bank, and it is supposed that he slipped into the river and was drowned. An inquest was held at the Workhouse on Monday evening by the Coroner (Mr. R. A. Wilson), Mr. G. Wyatt being foreman of the jury.

Mr. Richard Lyle, master of the Workhouse, deposed that Fryer had been an inmate of the Workhouse for 24 years. He came from St Martin's parish, Salisbury, and was by trade a shoemaker. His age was 83. On the morning of May 18th he wandered away from the Workhouse without leave. He suffered from gout, but he could get about all right, and he assisted in the shoemaker's shop. Every possible enquiry had been made for the old man, but no information was gained concerning him until his body was found in the water.

Eli Haskell, an inmate of the workhouse, said he was driving the bread van to Downton on Wednesday, 18th May, at eight a.m., when he overtook John Fryer on Longford Hill. The old man was walking along the road steadily, and in reply to witness's question "What are you up to, John," he said "I am going along here for a walk."

Thomas Lucas, a carter in the employ of Mr. Rumming, of Britford, said he was walking along New-Road, Nunton, on Sunday evening with his mother-in-law and a little boy, when the latter called attention to a peculiar smell. He looked over the hedge and saw a body in the water carried. A man who was sitting on Nunton Bridge at once went off to call the Charlton constable.

By the Coroner: There is a weak place in the hedge close to the spot where the body was found. The water meadow was in the occupation of Mr. Fray, of Nunton. Witness subsequently helped to remove the body.

Police-constable Herbert Cox, stationed at Charlton, stated that at 6.30 on the previous evening he received information that a dead body had been found at Nunton. He at once proceeded to a spot on the left hand side of the road leading from Nunton Bridge to the village, and found deceased lying on the left side of his face in the main water carrier. The legs and thighs were immersed in water and mud, but the upper part of the body was dry. Opposite the body there was a small gap in the thorns, and the water carrier was directly inside the hedge. Three weeks ago there was a lot of water in the meadows, but on Friday last, the water was drawn off, and when the body was found there were only a few inches of water in the carrier.

By the foreman: The body was fully dressed, and the hat was embedded in the mud beneath the head. The body had probably been completely under water until the last few days.

Mr. J. C. S. Peatson, *locum tenens* for Mr. L. S. Luckham, the Workhouse Medical Officer, deposed that he examined the body on Monday morning. It was in an advanced state of decomposition, especially the head and the face, the bones of which were entirely bare. It was impossible to make any careful examination. There was no reason to doubt that the old man's death was due to drowning.

The Coroner said there was no reason to suppose that the old man had met with foul play. It appeared likely that he went inside the hedge and accidentally slipped into the water.

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Mr. Lyle, in reply to the Coroner, said Fryer was a general favourite in the House. He was fond of walking in the country, and he was always a sober man. He was a lover of birds, and it was his delight to have a linnnet or a lark in the shoemaker's shop.

The jury found that the deceased was accidentally drowned.

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