



# *Coroner's Inquest Report*

## *Inquest of William Charles Smith 1932*

On Thursday morning Mr William Charles Smith aged 45 of Naish House Farm, Spirthill, Calne, was found by one of his employees with an abdominal gunshot wound, lying close to a gate on his farm, with a gun beneath him. Assistance was at once procured, and Mr Smith was conveyed in the ambulance to the Chippenham Cottage Hospital, where he died on Friday. Deceased was a native of Morecombe, Dorset, and came to Naish House Farm 20 years ago, marrying a daughter of the occupant, the late Mr Saul Jeffreys.

An inquest was opened on Saturday by Mr A L Forrester (Coroner) who sat with a jury. Walter Jeffreys, farmer of Stanley, a brother-in-law, gave evidence of identification.

A labourer named Ponting, who was the only witness called, said when he was in a field with the horses he heard a shout, and, turning towards where it came, he saw Smith wave his hat. Witness went to him, found him close by a gate with a gun beneath him.

The witness seemed unable to answer other questions put to him, and the inquest was adjourned for the attendance of other people who were called to the scene.

The resumed inquest was held on Monday evening, when Mr M B Cole, of Reading, represented an insurance company.

Albert Hobbs, of Glebe Cottage, Bremhill, a roadman, gave evidence of being called by Ponting between 9.20 and 9.45. Mr Smith said to him, "What a poor, unfortunate creature I am. My poor wife and children."

Witness and others conveyed him to the farmyard and witness saw a rabbit by his side. Witness asked him if he slipped off the gate, and he said he did.

Samuel William Douglas Smith, a son of deceased, said his father went out shooting rabbits at least three times a week.

The witness was asked if the gun had a safety catch, and one of the jury (Mr J B Warrilow, a gun expert) said: "No, the gun is unsafe, and very much out of order."

In reply to further questions, witness said his father had a gun accident in the first week in February this year, when he slipped down a bank. The gun then took one toe off.

Dr M C Perham, of Chippenham, spoke of finding a shot wound just under the heart, on the left side. Witness asked him how he did it, and he said. "I went down the field after a rabbit. I had shot at one, I had got over the gate, and I slipped and the gun went off." An operation was performed in the afternoon, and deceased died soon after 10 on Friday morning from shock, following the gunshot wound.

Dr George Laurence of Chippenham, who examined deceased at the hospital and described the extensive character of the injuries, said the bullet had evidently gone downwards, upwards and backwards, and the shot had hardly had time to spread at such short range.

The jury returned a verdict that the deceased died as the result of a gunshot wound through the accidental discharge of a gun while getting over a gate.

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