



A typical lime kiln

John Simpkins

Awful Death

Mr Whitmarsh held an inquest on Tuesday last at Wootton Bassett, on the body of a labourer on the Great Western Railway, named John Simpkins, 25 years of age. It appeared from the evidence of a fellow labourer, that he and deceased lived in the parish of Lyneham; that they spent the previous Saturday evening together at different public-houses in Wootton Bassett; that at one public-house they had three quarters of rum and gin between them; that at another, the deceased drank one or two glasses of rum; and that at about twelve o'clock at night they left the Steamcoach public house, and proceeded homewards; that at a short distance from Wootton Bassett however, deceased loller'd behind; that witness occasionally turn'd round, and saw him following slowly; that he at length missed sight of him, and arriving at home, went to bed. Witness also stated, that notwithstanding the quantity of spirits the deceased had drunk, he was not intoxicated; and that he did not stop for him to come up, because he knew that deceased was accustomed to lie about by night, and that whatever he might say would not induce him to go home. Another witness (a lad) stated, that as he was walking over the Railway skew-bridge, between nine and ten o'clock on the Sunday morning, " he smelt as if something was burning;" and upon looking about he saw the deceased lying on his back by the side of the railway, within twenty yards of a lime kiln – naked – his clothes having literally been burnt off his back - nothing but his shoes and wrist cuffs were remaining on him; and the wrist cuffs appeared to have been preserved by his placing his arms in an upright position.

There was no doubt that he went to sleep near the kiln, and after a part of his clothes had been consumed, he rolled off to the place where he was found. A wheelbarrow, which it is supposed he had placed near the kiln to shelter him from the wind, was also burnt to ashes, with the exception of the iron work. His body presented a most shocking spectacle. Verdict – Accidental.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, 11 February 1841