



Inquest on John Hiscock

Our town has been in an unusual state of excitement during the week, independent of the bustle that the Yeomanry Cavalry would naturally produce. A little boy named John Hiscock, 8 years of age, an inmate of the Workhouse, had been afflicted with a clubfoot; and Mr Maurice, the surgeon to the Union, thought it necessary to operate upon him. The first operation was performed in the early part of last week, and the boy appeared to be proceeding favourably; a second operation was performed a few days afterwards, but on the morning succeeding this operation, the poor boy was found dead in his bed.

Rumours soon became prevalent that the operation was unskillful, and that the death of the boy was the result. The whole town has therefore been ever in a violent state of excitement.

Mr Whitmarsh held an inquest on the body on Monday last, and adjourned it to yesterday, for the purpose of a post-mortem examination. It was a long time before the parties interested could agree upon the gentleman to perform this examination.

The Guardians and Jury – from the feeling exhibited by the medical gentlemen of Marlborough – thought it better to call in a surgeon from a distance, and they at length determined upon Mr Geo. Waylen, of Devizes.

The place where the inquest was held was crowded to excess. – The whole of the Workhouse authorities, and we believe, the whole of the inmates, were present; with magistrates, attorneys and surgeons innumerable.

The most breathless anxiety was manifested whilst Mr Waylen was giving his evidence. It was to the following effect.

I have made a post mortem examination of the body. I found the lungs, heart and liver healthy, the mucous membrane of the stomach was slightly inflamed, and contained a few ounces of a yellowish fluid. The bowels were inflamed – the last four feet of the ilium presented as many as five instances of what, in the profession, is called intersusception – one portion of the bowels passing into another as the food passes. The diseased portion of the bowels was here presented to the Jury; and Mr Waylen distinctly told them that the boy must inevitably have died from the disease, if no operation had been performed upon him. In short, the operation had nothing whatever to do with the death of the boy. A number of questions was asked of Mr Waylen, and readily answered; but his opinion as to the cause of death was clear and decided.

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Mr Lane, consulting surgeon of St Mary's and the Lock Hospitals, London, was present during the Post-mortem examination, and fully confirmed Mr Waylen's testimony.

The Jury, of course, returned their verdict in accordance.

(The feeling raised against Mr Maurice may be partly attributed to his having performed the operation, without the assistance of another surgeon.)

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, 12 May 1853