



SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



Sutton Veny

Stephen WHATLEY 11th August, 1905

Drinking Bout Ends in Hanging

A determined case of suicide by an elderly unmarried man, named Stephen Whatley, living in a home by himself, was investigated at Sutton Veny by Mr A. P. Sylvester (coroner) and a jury, of whom Mr J. G. Lines was foreman.

Charlotte Whatley, wife of Richard Whatley, said she was a sister-in-law of the deceased, who was 73 years of age and worked as a road man for the Warminster Rural District Council. The deceased gave way to drink occasionally. She last saw him a fortnight ago, when he was cleaning up the gutters by the side of the road near her gate. Witness had heard deceased threaten to take his life, the reason for this being that he became depressed after a bout of drinking. It seemed that when he took to the drink he never ate any food, which made him feel very low and bad. She did not think he was right in his mind after one of these drinking bouts, and she believed he had only worked one day during the last fortnight. Witness did not think deceased had quarrelled with anyone.

Annie Kill, wife of George Henry Kill, living in High Street, Sutton Veny, said that as a neighbour she often went to see the deceased, who did the cooking and managed for himself. She last saw him alive at a quarter past four on Monday afternoon, when he was walking up the street, and asked her to lend him sixpence, which she did. Deceased had been drinking during the last week or two.

The Coroner: Where did he get the drink?

Witness: He sometimes went to the public house and drank and sometimes brought beer home with him. He had threatened to do away with himself a good many times. On the previous day witness said she was standing by the gate and saw the deceased's hat near the door. She entered the house and called out "Stephen" but received no answer. She then looked round and saw the man's feet at the bottom of the stairs. They were touching the ground. Witness called Mrs Snelgrove and Mrs Hinton and when she got back to the house again she saw that Whatley was hung by a rope in the stair case. PC Carpenter happened to be passing the gate at the time and he cut the deceased down. There was no sign of life.

Dr Hinton (Heytesbury) said he attended the deceased last August when he was in a state of coma through drink, and was unconscious for a long time. There were no marks of violence, and the noose of the rope was so formed that death would have resulted more through strangulation than hanging. He considered that death was caused by asphyxia and that the man had made a determined attempt at suicide whilst in a state of coma.

PC Carpenter said that he was called at 2.30 on Tuesday afternoon and after he had cut the man down he commenced artificial respiration, but found that he was quite dead, although the body did not appear to be cold. The deceased had a knife, a purse, and a half-penny, in his possession, and there was plenty of food in the house.

The Coroner said the evidence pointed to a most determined case of suicide. It was usual to bring in a verdict that the man was not responsible for his actions and he thought such a verdict would fit that case.

The jury agreed and returned a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity.

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