

## Wiltshire Gentleman Commits Suicide 1901

### A Wife's Shocking Discovery



A painful sensation was caused at Winterbourne Gunner, Wilts, on Friday by the sad news that Mr George Preece, of Hillside, had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head.

It appears that he got up at his usual time on Friday morning, and was seen to leave the house with a gun in his hand. He did not come in to breakfast, and on Mrs Preece going out to look for her husband, she was horrified to find that he had shot himself in the stable, which is situated close to the back door of the house. He was quite dead, and there could be no doubt that he had committed suicide, for beside the body lay a lath, which he had apparently used to pull the triggers of his double-barrelled gun, in the chambers of which were two empty cartridges. The top of Mr Preece's head was blown away, and the brains were scattered.

Mr Preece was formerly agent for the estate of Sir Edmund Antrobus, but on the death of the late baronet, about two years ago, he left that occupation and came to reside at Winterbourne. Nothing unusual had been noticed in his manner of late, and no motive for his act was disclosed at the inquest, but it seems that he has been somewhat low and depressed at times.

The Coroner for South Wilts, Mr R A Wilson, held an inquest at the residence of the deceased on Friday evening, Mr G F Gay being appointed foreman of the jury.

Mrs Elizabeth Preece, the widow, deposed that her husband had followed no employment since he left Sir Edmund Antrobus. He was 51 years of age. He had been living in that house since September 1899. That morning witness got up about 7.15, and left deceased in bed. He came down about ten minutes past eight, and went straight out of the house into the yard. He had not had breakfast, and witness waited for him to come in. Nothing had passed between them, and when deceased went out, he did not appear to be unusual in his manner. He had a letter that morning, but it did not upset him. It was a bill amounting to something like £15 or £20. Before he went out he said what he would have for his breakfast. He was a long time coming in, and witness went to call him. On looking into the stable she saw him lying on the floor. Deceased had no money troubles, but he had not been so well since he had lived at Winterbourne. He had never threatened his life, and witness knew of no reason why he should make away with himself. He suffered sometimes with his head.

By the Foreman: About Christmas time he was attended by Dr Luckham and at that time he said he thought it was his liver, and that if he had more to do he would be better. The doctor advised him to ride a bicycle.

Annie Brewer, domestic servant, in the employ of Mrs Preece, said she had been living in the house one year and five months. She saw her master come down that morning about a quarter past eight. He put on his boots in the breakfast room, took the gun from a corner in the dining room, and went out of the back door. Witness did not notice where he went, but she thought he went straight to the stable. She did not hear the gun go off, but her mistress said she thought she heard something. Deceased had had the gun some time. He was not in the habit of taking the gun out, but he took it out the previous day because he said some ducks were coming over. He did not speak to witness before he went out that morning. Witness took a letter to Mr Preece in his bedroom before he got up.

Supt Longstone stated that that morning he received a telegram from Mr Gay, and immediately drove over to Winterbourne. On his arrival the key of the stable was handed to him by a man named Brown. On unlocking the stable door he found the deceased lying on his back in the first stall. Both hands were stretched out, and the left leg was slightly drawn up. On the left side, and within 18 inches of the body, was a double-barrelled gun, produced, in the chambers of which were two empty cartridges. On the right of the body was the lath, produced, which had evidently been used to pull the triggers. The top of Mr Preece's head was blown away, and the brains were scattered. Beneath the body was a very large quantity of blood. The deceased was fully dressed. In the pockets of the clothing witness found a watch, a purse, and keys.

The Foreman asked the Superintendent why the local policeman was away from the district when he was sent for that morning. Supt Longstone said the constable was on duty at Bulford.

The Coroner said this was just one of those sad and unsatisfactory cases with which one hardly knew how to deal. There seemed to be no doubt that this man shot himself, committed suicide in fact; and that being so they had to inquire in what state of mind he was at the time. It was always his endeavour in such cases to try and find a motive for the deed, but here there seemed to be no motive. He (the Coroner) thought it probable that all the jury knew the deceased as well, as he did. He was always a peculiarly excitable man. Sometimes, when under the influence of excitement he could hardly speak.

Mrs Preece, who was re-called at the suggestion of the Foreman, stated that as far as she knew there was no insanity in her late husband's family. He was very excitable, but she had not noticed anything unusual lately.

The Foreman: Has he been depressed?

Witness: He has been low. He has not been in his usual spirits since he had been here.

The Coroner: Was he trying to get anything to do?

Witness: Yes, he has been.

The jury returned a verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind."

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