



CORONERS INQUESTS



Winterbourne Stoke

Mr. Frank Grant

A painful incident, resulting in the death of Mr. Frank Grant, a retired carrier, of Winterbourne Stoke, who was well known and much respected in the village and district, occurred on Friday morning. Mr. Grant, who, since his retirement, had lived at the village post office, had not been in good health for some time, and on Friday morning was found on his son's farm at Winterbourne Stoke with a gun shot wound in the head, and a double-barreled gun lying close by. He was removed to his son's house and lived for a couple of days, but died early on Sunday morning as a result of his injuries.

An inquest was held in the village reading room on Monday by the County Coroner (Mr. W. J. Trethowan), who, addressing the jury, said they were called together to enquire into the death of Mr. Frank Grant, who was well known to all of them and who, as they probably knew, did not seem to have been in his usual state of health of late. They would have no difficulty, he thought, in coming to the conclusion that he shot himself. The next point they would have to enquire into was whether, in their opinion, his mind had not to some extent gone, whether at the time he was not suffering from some ailment which caused him to be temporarily insane. From the evidence he would put before them, he thought they would probably be able to come to the conclusion, that although the deceased shot himself, he was temporarily insane at the time. The evidence seemed pretty clear, and knowing the man as they did, he did not think they would have very great difficulty in saying that he was not responsible for what he did at the time he shot himself. The Coroner added that he thought the evidence would show that deceased shot himself and that nobody else did it.

Edward William Grant, farmer and contractor, stated that his father was a retired carrier, and had been living at the post office for some time. His father used to live in the house he (the son) was now occupying, and had lived there nearly all his life, but the change was necessary owing to business arrangements, and he did not think his father grieved at the change. About six years ago, however, he met with an accident and injured his leg, and that had been troubling him lately. On the night before his death he complained about the pain in his leg. Sometimes recently he had appeared a little strange, and was always worrying, but he had never threatened to commit suicide. At seven o'clock on Friday morning his father came up to see him, and he appeared to be quite bright. His father helped him in his work, and before leaving said something about the non-arrival of the dividend on some shares he held. He did not appear to be worrying about that however, and seemed quite bright when witness left him at a quarter-to-nine. The witness added that he had a gun, which was usually kept in the cart shed for the convenience of a young man who used it for shooting birds and rats on the farm. Soon after eleven o'clock, the son continued, he was called by the Rev. F. W. Wayet, and on going to the cowshed he saw his father lying there, wounded in the head. No cartridges were kept in the shed, and if his father loaded the gun he must have brought them with him.

Alice Gertrude Grant, wife of the last witness, stated that she did not think Mr. Grant had been worrying more than usual of late. On Friday morning he appeared to be quite rational, and when he came in wished her "Good Morning" quite brightly. He left the house directly after breakfast and did not return until 11 o'clock. He was then pushing some trucks, but he left them in the yard and went into the cart shed. She did not see him for about 10 minutes, and then, while she was talking to a customer, she saw him in the cow yard with a gun in his hand, walking towards the cow shed in which he was afterwards found. The thought struck her "he is going to do for that peacock." The peacock had been a perfect pest to him, and it had interfered with the fowls and that had worried him a great deal, so much so, in fact, that he had threatened to shoot it. About two minutes afterwards she heard the report of a gun, and she was frightened by the peculiar noise it made. She ran up to her mother-in-law, and on their return, Mrs. Grant snr., called, but as there was no answer, she went into the cow shed and there she found him.

Lewis Henry Dyer, blacksmith, of Winterbourne Stoke, stated that the deceased was his uncle. He had seen him practically every day for some time, but he could not say that he had been worrying more than usual, although he had complained of the pain in his leg. The witness said that on Friday morning he was called to the cow shed by his aunt. Mr. Grant was lying with his head towards the crib, with a gun and a small withy stick quite close. He was unconscious but groaning, and made no reply when spoken to. A doctor was sent for, and witness then examined the gun and found that it contained a used cartridge and had just been fired. In reply to the Coroner, the witness said there were shot marks on the roof of the shed which, in conjunction with the position of the wound in the deceased's head showed that the gun must have been discharged with the stock on the ground and the barrels pointing upwards almost perpendicularly.

Dr. Hall, of Shrewton, stated that when he arrived at 11.20 on Friday morning he found the deceased with a very big wound in the side of the head, which tended upwards, and increased in size as it went back. The side of the head was blown away, and the brain was badly lacerated. Judging by shotmarks on the roof the gun must have been pointed straight upwards. He considered that the gun must have been fired with the stock on the ground, and pointed perpendicularly, and the wound must have been caused by the deceased standing with his head directly over, and close to the barrel. In that position it would be possible to fire the gun with the finger, and even if it could not be fired that way it could be fired with a stick.

The Coroner: Of course, it is only a theory; but did you arrive at any theory after an examination of the head, the marks of the shot on the roof, and the stick and the gun?

I formed the opinion that the gun was fired at close quarters to the head, because the wound on the forehead was so small. If the gun had been fired a short distance away, one would have expected a much larger wound in the forehead, but it was not more than an inch. The gun must have fired at close quarters, at any rate, not more than an inch or two from the head. I should say that the muzzle of the gun was touching the forehead.

That being so, your opinion would be that it was not an accident?

It is just possible, but improbable. If it was an accident he must have been examining it at close quarters.

The doctor added that Mr. Grant died on Sunday morning from exhaustion and shock following laceration of the brain caused by a gun-shot wound. He added that he had attended deceased previously, but not for some little time before the occurrence. He had noticed nothing which would induce him to think that Mr. Grant would make an attempt on his life.

The Coroner, in summing up, said there was really not much evidence to assist them on the point of whether it was an accident, or whether the act was done intentionally. If they found it was done intentionally he thought they could fairly come to the conclusion that Mr. Grant was temporarily insane when he did it. He had had a certain amount of worry, and his leg had been troubling him of late. Of course, they might say it was an accident, but he could not help feeling from the position of the gun, and the position in which deceased must have stood, that it could hardly have been an accident.

The jury returned a verdict of "Suicide whilst temporarily insane."

The Foreman said he had been asked to express the deep regret of the jury and the villagers generally at the sad occurrence, and their sympathy with the family.

The Coroner said he would like to associate himself with that.

Salisbury Times, 18 February 1911

Newspaper Report

Death – Grant- On the 12th inst., at Winterbourne Stoke, Salisbury, Frank Grant, aged 68. **Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 18 February 1911**