

Inquest - Walter Rowe 1938



Salisbury City Coroner (Mr A M Wilson) sat with a jury, of which Mr Thomas Cusworth was elected foreman, at Salisbury General Infirmary on Friday to enquire into the circumstances relating to the death of Walter Rowe, aged 54, a labourer of "Farnalls," Ansty Coombe, Tisbury, which was reported in our last issue. Mr G Leopold Lush represented the owners and driver of the lorry.

Victor Taylor, general labourer, of Ansty Coombe, a step-son gave evidence of identification.

Lemuel John Stokes, labourer, of 27, Swallow's-lane, Ansty, stated that on Wednesday he and Rowe were riding in a motor-lorry driven by a man named Wilkins from Chilmark to Tisbury. They had ceased work owing to the wet weather and were on their way home, accepting a lift in Wilkins' lorry. They sat in the body of the lorry, witness in the rear and Rowe with his back against the driver's cab. When they reached Place Farm, Court-street, near Tisbury, the lorry pulled in to the left to allow another lorry, which was behind them pass.

After the lorry had passed, Wilkins' vehicle was almost stationery when Rowe and witness decided to get off as they would be leaving the lorry at the next corner and they thought Wilkins had pulled up to let them get off. Witness got off the lorry on its near side and as he went around to the other side he saw Rowe, who was in the act of getting off, slip as he reached the ground on the offside. The lorry was then just moving and the rear off-wheel went over his leg. They did not tell the driver that they were getting off the lorry. It was raining and the road was very greasy. There was no other traffic passing at the time of the accident. Witness called out to Wilkins, who stopped the lorry. A doctor was summoned and ordered Rowe's removal to Salisbury Infirmary. Witness and Rowe were in the habit of walking to and from their work, a distance of five miles each way, getting lifts when they could.

In reply to questions by Mr Lush, witness said he was not sure in which direction the lorry which passed them was proceeding. It had been arranged that they should be dropped at the crossroads.

Albert Henry Wilkins of Chilmark, an employee of Messrs. Spiller & Wilkins, the driver of the lorry, stated that he was leaving the RAF Depot, at Chilmark, going in the direction of Tisbury, when he was stopped by two men - Rowe and Stokes - one of whom put up his hand and asked witness if he was going to Tisbury, to which he replied "Yes". The men did not ask for a lift, but they jumped on the back of the lorry. Witness asked them where they wanted to get out, and one replied "The Cross, Tisbury".

As he was nearing Place Farm, Tisbury, he saw a motor-lorry approaching and as there was not sufficient room for the two vehicles to pass on the bridge he slowed down to let the other lorry cross over the bridge first. As witness was again gaining speed, after the other lorry had passed, he saw a movement in his mirror - either on the lorry or on the green, he could not say which - and stopped the lorry and got out. He then found Rowe lying in the road a few feet behind the rear wheel of the lorry. They were about half-a-mile from the crossroads, where the men were to get off.

PC Mathews, Tisbury, stated that he was called to the scene of the accident and found Rowe lying at the rear of the lorry, on the road, with his head and shoulders to the offside of the lorry. It was raining and Rowe was wet through.

Dr David Joy, resident medical officer at the Infirmary, stated that Rowe was admitted at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, suffering from severe shock, a fracture of the left femur and bruising over the left hip joint. He was conscious on admission but died at 10.15 am on Thursday.

A post-mortem examination was made by Dr Dalmady on the instructions of the Coroner and this disclosed multiple injuries, including fractures of the ribs and left femur. Death was due to shock consequent upon recent multiple injuries.

The Coroner said there was no suggestion of any blame being attached to the driver of the lorry. If there was any blame at all he thought the jury would agree that it could only be attached to the poor unfortunate man himself, because the driver had no idea that they were going to get off there, in view of the fact that they had already told him that they wanted to get off at the cross, Tisbury. It seemed rather extraordinary that they should have got off there, which was half-a-mile away from where they wanted to be dropped, but the explanation given by Stokes was that they thought the driver was stopping there, as, on previous occasions, they had been dropped at that spot.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death" and exonerated the driver of the lorry from blame.

Mr Lush, on behalf of the owners and driver of the lorry, expressed sympathy with Rowe's relatives, to whom the jury gave their fees.

Western Gazette Friday 14 October 1938