

## PUBS & INQUESTS

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two pubs in Wentworth village were frequently used by the Coroner for the district for the purpose of holding an inquest - a procedure which involved a 'view' of the body, presumably displayed in an open coffin. The following report would seem to show that clinical depression was as common in times past as, unfortunately, it still is today. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for Wednesday 14 August 1861 carried the news of the

### SUICIDE OF A SHEFFIELD TRADESMAN

Yesterday an inquest was held the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, before John Webster, Esq., deputy coroner, on view of the body of Mr. Thomas Binks, plumber, Suffolk road, who had that morning committed suicide by hanging. It appeared that on Monday the deceased went over to Wentworth, and wanted to have an interview with Mr. John Raiding, wood agent to Earl Fitzwilliam. Some misunderstanding existed between the deceased and Mr. Falding, and the latter was not wishful to have an interview. The deceased went to the residence of Mr. Falding on Monday evening, but did not succeed in seeing him.

Yesterday morning, about six o'clock, a man named Sykes discovered the body of the deceased hanging in an apple tree in Mr. Falding's garden. A bag containing a six-barrelled revolver, with all the barrels loaded, a sharp pointed knife and a bottle of poison were found near the body. The deceased for some time previously had been in a desponding state of mind consequent upon serious losses in business, and also from the fact of several of his patents for water closets having proved unsuccessful. The deceased's father, it was also stated, was an eccentric man, and was considered of unsound mind. The jury, after short consultation, were unanimous in a verdict that the deceased had committed suicide whilst in a state of temporary insanity.

A case involving the most terrible and tragic, but not unusual, of crimes was related in the *Sheffield Independent* for Tuesday 19 January 1875:<sup>1</sup>

### THE ALLEGED CHILD MURDER AT WENTWORTH

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, 'Ponds', and the newspaper report from 1840 for another such case.

The adjourned inquest upon the body of a newly born female child, which is supposed to have been murdered by its mother immediately after its birth, was resumed yesterday at the Green Dragon Inn, Wentworth, before the Deputy Coroner (B. Bagshawe, Esq.) The mother, Rebecca Jessop, a single woman, about 30 years of age, was present in custody of Police-sergeant M'Veitty. The prisoner lived with her father, David Jessop, a labourer, 72 years of age, in the Barrow Hospital, at Wentworth, in which twelve poor persons are maintained by Earl Fitzwilliam. She was of weak intellect, but according to the statement of one of the witnesses was not very much wrong.

On New Year's Day she complained of being unwell, and was advised to have a doctor, but she refused. On the following morning she went into a house occupied by Margaret Taylor, an old woman, also an inmate of the almshouses, for whom she was in the habit of cleaning the house. She went into the bedroom, as Mrs. Taylor thought, to make the bed; but instead of doing so she delivered herself of a child, which she immediately drowned in the night commode. She then called Mrs. Taylor, who asked her what was the matter. She replied, "It's a child; don't say anything about it." Several neighbours were called in, and they removed the woman to bed. The child was taken out of the utensil, but was quite dead. The women asked the prisoner why she had killed the child, and she replied that she had no clothes ready for it. She was attended by Dr. Clarke, and recovered so far that on the 14th she was taken into custody by Police sergeant M'Veitty. Several old women from the almshouses bore out the above statement of fact in evidence.

Dr. Clarke, of Wentworth, said on the 2nd January he was sent for to attend the prisoner, and found that she had recently been delivered of a female child. He had seen the child, which was a full grown female. There were no marks of strangulation. He made a post-mortem examination, and found that the lungs had been fully inflated. They filled the chest, and when put in water they floated. The other organs of the body were healthy. The child had had a separate existence. In his opinion the cause of death was suffocation by drowning. Her confinement was an easy one, and he did not think that she was so far unconscious as not to know what she was doing. He asked the prisoner if she heard the child cry, and she said she did.

Police-sergeant M'Veitty deposed to apprehending the prisoner, and on charging her with the wilful murder of her child, she said, "I did not know what it was until the child was born. I am not the first, and I won't be the last."

The Coroner briefly summed up the evidence, and said the points they had to consider were whether the mother had been guilty of committing a crime in reference to the death of her child. If they thought she went into the house of Mrs. Taylor, well-knowing that she was going to be confined and determined to make away with the child as soon as it was born, it would be their duty to return a verdict of wilful murder. If they thought she was suffering great bodily and perhaps great

mental pain, and did not know exactly what she was doing, that would reduce their verdict to manslaughter. They might think that the death of the child resulted from an accident, but in that case he must ask them well to weigh over the evidence before they resolved upon their verdict.

The room was then cleared, and after deliberating over half-an-hour, the jury returned a verdict of "Manslaughter" against the mother. The Coroner informed the prisoner of the result of the inquiry, and told her that she would be committed for trial at the assizes, on the charge. He would, however, if she could find sureties, accept bail for her appearance?

Such was the verdict of the Coroner's jury; but what we have been reading about so far was only the inquest. The criminal proceedings would remain to be dealt with by a judge and petty jury at the Leeds Assizes, and in those days, this involved a prior consideration by a grand jury, such as they still have in the United States.<sup>2</sup> However, events now took an unexpected turn. The *Leeds Times* for Saturday 27 March 1875 reported that the case was never even considered by the grand jury, because Rebecca Jessop's father informed the court that his daughter had died in Wakefield Jail.<sup>3</sup>

On further examination of the newspaper reports from 1875, we find that the cause of Rebecca Jessop's death was not suicide or depression or other mental illness, as one might have expected, but typhoid fever. The *Leeds Times* for Saturday 27 February 1875 reported as follows:

#### **MORE DEATHS FROM FEVER AT THE WEST RIDING HOUSE OF CORRECTION**

During the past week two more deaths have taken place at the Wakefield House of Correction from typhoid fever and inquests have been held. At an inquiry on Monday on the body of Rebecca Jessop, twenty-nine years of age, who had been committed on a charge of having killed her daughter, Mr Dyson Wood, assistant surgeon, remarked that the cause of death was typhoid fever, and that at present it was somewhat epidemic but it had abated in the last few days, and diarrhoea was also abating. The supply of water from one of the sources belonging to the prison had been suspected of having created the outbreak; but the Waterworks Company's water had since been laid on to the woman's prison, and other means had been taken in order to stop the disease. In the case of Jessop she had stated to a female attendant that she had been confined a week before she was arrested. She complained of illness, but appeared to have no particular disease when admitted, and had the usual diet of prisoners commuted for trial.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of a grand jury was abolished in England and Wales in 1933.

<sup>3</sup> See also report in the *Leeds Times* for 6 March 1875.

Turning to a different kind of crime altogether, many thefts must have been committed in local pubs, but I suspect that it was rare for one to be committed so openly, as on the following occasion: the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* for Tuesday 17 April 1888 reported:

### **SHEFFIELD MAN CHARGED WITH THEFT**

At the Rotherham Police-Court yesterday James Foster, plumber, Sheffield, was charged with stealing a ham, value 12s., the property of Thomas Abson, landlord of the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst. Mr. Hickmott prosecuted, and Mr. Gilchard for the prisoner. The evidence went to show that the evening of Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> inst., the prisoner was at the Rockingham Arms, when he got from his seat and took a ham from a hook on the ceiling, near the tap-room door, and ran away with it. There was a number of people in the tap-room at the time. The landlord, hearing of the theft, pursued the prisoner, but failed to catch him. He was apprehended in Sheffield on the 7<sup>th</sup> instant, at his father's house. The Sheffield Police Station prisoner said to witness, "If I had known you had been coming, I should have cleared off." — The magistrates having decided to commit the defendant for trial, Mr. Gilchard reserved his defence, but the cross-examination showed the affair was looked upon as a joke. — Prisoner was committed for trial at the ensuing Leeds Assize.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover what happened subsequently in this case; but I suspect that the prosecution probably failed, possibly because the grand jury found that there was no true bill of indictment.

Another kind of dishonesty was involved in the crime reported in the *Sheffield Independent* for Saturday 21 September 1889. This involved both pubs in the village of Wentworth:

### **CAPTURE OF AN ALLEGED HORSE STEALER AT WENTWORTH**

On Wednesday evening a man named Joseph Dyson, of Newhill, near Melton, called at Mr. Rimes', George and Dragon Inn, and on Mr. Thomas Abson of the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, with a horse which he was offering for sale. Mr. Abson examined the animal, but not being able to come to terms, Dyson asking £24 and ultimately reducing to £9, Mr. Abson's suspicions were aroused. He sent for Police-constable Hutchinson, who questioned Dyson, and ultimately took him into custody, detaining the animal at the Rockingham Arms. It appears that Dyson had taken the horse from a field, and Mr. Wm. Blackburn, whose property the animal was, did not

miss it until Thursday morning, on hearing of the same being at Wentworth he came over and owned it as his property.

What was the outcome? Dyson was certainly committed for trial; but again I have been able to discover what happened to him when he was tried. However, the committal proceedings in the magistrates' court at Rotherham were reported in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for Tuesday 24 September 1889:

**HORSE STEALING AT WENTWORTH.** Joseph Dyson, labourer, Newhill was charged with having stolen a black mare, value £23, the property of William Blackburn, farmer, Thornhill Hall, Wath, on the 18<sup>th</sup> September. Mr. A. P. Aizlewood prosecuted. The prosecutor put the mare in his field on the morning the 18<sup>th</sup>. On the following day the animal was missing, and from information obtained he went to Wentworth. He called at the Rockingham Arms Inn, and Mr. Abson, the landlord, [and] showed him the mare. The Prosecutor had known the prisoner all his life, he having in his (prosecutor's) employment. The prisoner was seen riding the mare in a lane leading to Wentworth, and in reply to a question said, 'I was going to the Haugh. A man has lent me this mare to ride on.'

Thomas Abson said Dyson brought the mare to his premises, and asked him to buy it. The price was £34. Witness asked who the mare belonged to, and the prisoner answered that it was the property of his mother, who lived at Birdwell. The mare was tried in harness, and while witness and the prisoner were driving in the direction of Rotherham the prisoner offered to sell for £14. He asked the witness to give him the money, and to drive him to Masborough Station. Witness refused to comply, and returned to Wentworth. Witness's suspicions were aroused, and he communicated with Police-constable Hutchinson.

Police-constable Hutchinson proved taking the prisoner into custody. On the way to the police station prisoner said "It will serve me right if get 20 years for being such a ----- fool." In answer to the charge prisoner answered "That's true." Committed for trial to the Sessions.

The *Sheffield Independent* for Monday 2 June 1890 carried the report of yet another suicide - suicide being in itself a criminal offence until 1961:

#### **SUICIDE AT WENTWORTH**

On Saturday an inquest was held at the George and Dragon Inn, Wentworth, before Mr. Wightman, touching the death of Cornelius Batty, grocer's assistant aged 35 years, who committed suicide on the previous Sunday morning, by cutting his throat with a penknife. — Evidence was given by Frances Woodcock, mother of the deceased, who stated that deceased retired to bed about eleven o'clock the previous night, and complained of great pain in his head. She took him his breakfast upstairs on the Sunday morning, and he told her to call him at 11 o'clock, as he had arranged to go out for a drive. At 11 o'clock he did not answer, and she found him dead. — Arthur Parkinson deposed that he found the deceased in the bed with a penknife in his right hand and his throat cut.— It having been shown that the deceased had been despondent and that there was insanity in the family, the jury returned a verdict that deceased committed suicide whilst suffering from temporary insanity.

There was a third case of child murder reported in the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* on Monday 1 May 1893:

#### THE CHILD MURDER AT WENTWORTH

The adjourned inquest on the body of the newly born male child of Emily Harriet Wilson, domestic servant at the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, was retried this afternoon. On the evening of the 9th April a child was found dead in the girl's box, and was part of an under garment. The doctor was of opinion that death had resulted from suffocating, and that the cloth could not have got into the mouth accidentally. Today a companion named Elizabeth Bower, married woman, said Wilson told her, in answer to questions, that the child was alive, and she put a handkerchief in its mouth. Mr. Gichard, who appeared for the girl, elicited, under cross-examination from Dr. Barr, that under the circumstances in which Wilson was placed she was prone to acute mania of a transient nature. The jury returned a verdict of "Wilful murder" against Wilson.

The poor girl was quickly dealt with at the Assizes, as reported in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* on Thursday 11 May 1893

At the Leeds Assizes yesterday Emily Harriet Wilson, domestic servant, was charged with the wilful murder her newly-born child at Wentworth on May 9. The jury found her guilty, but they considered she was not responsible for her actions. The prisoner was ordered to be kept in strict custody during Her Majesty's pleasure.

Our next inquest concerns a pure accident, rather than wilful homicide. The report was published in the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* for Monday 31 July 1893:

### **POISONED BY WEED KILLER AT WENTWORTH INQUEST**

To-day Mr. D. Wightman, coroner, held inquest at the Rockingham Arms, on the body of William Shiltfro, 74 years of age, a labourer in the gardens belonging to Earl Fitzwilliam, Wentworth Woodhouse. William Totty foreman gardener at Wentworth Woodhouse, said that about fortnight ago some weed destroyer in a four gallon tin was placed box inside a mushroom frame. He had told the deceased that the stuff was poisonous and that he must not touch it or it would soon put him in the churchyard. The poison was the colour of water, and had not been diluted all. The deceased drank out the can thinking that it was beer. The jury returned a verdict that deceased had died from having inadvertently [taken] poison.

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for Wednesday 16 August 1893 reported on a drowning in Betty Gill's Pond in Wentworth Park - a place which is known today as a place where the eponymous Bessie (supposedly a maid at Wentworth Woodhouse who 'fell' pregnant) supposedly drowned herself at some unspecified date:<sup>4</sup>

### **SUICIDE AT WENTWORTH**

Last night Mr. Bagshawe, deputy coroner, held an inquiry at the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, touching the death of John Kingstone, labourer aged 52 years, of Wentworth, who was found drowned in a sheet of water known Betty Gill's Pond,<sup>5</sup> Wentworth Park on Saturday afternoon. The deceased was well known in Wentworth, having in former years been employed by Earl Fitzwilliam at the Wentworth stables as a stable man, but for the last three years he has had no regular employment, and during the last few months has suffered great deal from indigestion and rheumatism and has been very depressed in spirits. After hearing the evidence, the jury returned a verdict of suicide whilst temporarily insane.

The following headlines in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for Wednesday 31 August 1904 give us the story which follows in a nutshell:

### **A ROTHERHAM TRAGEDY**

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<sup>4</sup> Although in an old postcard I have seen it referred to as 'the Lady Pond.'

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes known as Bessie Gill's Pond: see photo in Johnson & Johnson (who also have a photo of the bridge over the main ponds in the Park). Compare the suicide in Dog Kennel Pond described in the next item, and the drowning of a baby in Glasshouse Green pond described above.

## SUICIDE FOLLOWS LOVE DISAPPOINTMENT

There was an element of romance connected with the death of Herbert Marklew (23), of Rotherham, blacksmith's striker, on whose body an inquest was held before Mr. Wightman at the Milton Arms, Greasborough, yesterday. Marklew was found drowned in the Dog Kennel pond, Wentworth Park, on Sunday morning, the police having been led to make search through the discovery of a man's cap with two short notes fastened inside.

The father, William Marklew, colliery labourer, of Eastwood Dale, formally identified the remains those of his son, who had lived with him. In the latter part of last year his son got into some trouble through a girl. He had been engaged to a young woman, but the engagement was broken off. For several weeks he was at home in a depressed condition. At the beginning of the year he became engaged to another girl, but it was broken off at the end of March, and the old engagement was renewed. That was as far as they knew. There no breaking off a second time. On Thursday morning his son left home between nine and ten, and did not return. On the Wednesday night when he came home they noticed a change. He was in one of his old depressed moods, sat with his head in his hands, and did not speak to anyone. When he went out on Thursday, contrary to his practice, he did not say where he was going. When he did not come back inquiries were made from friends, but no news was received until Sunday morning, when Detective-Sergeant Ross, of the Rotherham Borough Force, gave him (witness) some information, and he went to the West Riding Office, and identified property which had been found. The letter produced was in his son's handwriting. It had been found on the bank of the dam with his cap, and was as under:

The owner of the cap is in the water. For information regarding his identity apply to Miss Searby, 105, Frederick Street, Rotherham.

The Coroner: After reading that, why do you think he has committed suicide?— Witness: That was the name of the girl he was engaged to —Miss Searby—and the only way I can account for it is this - we know the lad was the very soul of honour, and he made a promise, and she held him to it after the engagement was broken off, and he had gone back because she held him to the promise.

Then you believe it is entirely through his engagement with Miss Searby?— Her holding him to it.

Clara Searby, single woman, in her evidence, said she had known Heber Marklew about three years, but had not been engaged him.

The Coroner: Mind what you say, because his father has said it was broken off. If you were never engaged it could never be broken off. You mean to say you were never engaged him?— Witness: No, Sir.



During the three years you have known him, has he been engaged to any other girl?—He has kept company with another girl—Gerty Costall. He kept company with her for about three months, but it was unknown to me at the time. Did he break it off with her?—He was keeping company with me at the same time. I did not know about it until afterwards.

Who got tired of it first, you or Gerty? Did you tell him you would have no more to do with him, at any time? —Oh, no.

The Coroner: what was the meaning of the letter? It was found with his cap, and they were to apply you for some information. When did you last see him alive? On Wednesday evening last, at 105, Frederick Street. It was between ten and eleven o' clock. There was no quarrel, and never had been none.

Had you made any arrangements for meeting again?— Oh, no.

You were not going to meet him any more?— Well, he never spoke for the last half-hour. We had not intended to meet that night, only he came across me. I saw him the Sunday before when he pressed me to ask for half-a-day off. He was a little offended, but there was no quarrel. The half-day off was to go pleasuring. I refused. On the Wednesday I him in Frederick Street, between eight and nine o'clock, as I was on way to my sister's.

Where did you go with him? Are you trying to keep it back? Tell us where you went. - I went up to my sister at Masborough, and he went with me. He waited outside, and came back with me. There was no arrangement to meet again, and no quarrel.

Tell those gentlemen how you account for his going and getting into this dam, and writing this letter. If you had made friends again, and were perfectly good friends, and then he goes and commits suicide after leaving you, how do you account for it?—He asked me to leave my situation, and I refused to do so.

What then?— And he said, "You will never see me again."

What is your situation?—I am a general servant.

Why did he want you to leave your situation? To get married or what?— Yes.

Did he say so?— Yes.

Why not answer it at once? It makes us think there was something very queer about, it, because you do not answer. He did not say what he would do? - Oh, no.

When he said, "You will never see me again" what did you say to him? I am sure you would make some reply?—I said it was impossible at present.

Impossible what? — That I should leave my situation.

In inviting the father put questions to the witness, the coroner observed that he thought she knew a little 'tiny bit' more than she had told them.

The father: Did you on one occasion go to Costall, and ask why she was walking with Heber, when she was engaged to you?

Witness: Not properly engaged.

You made that statement, didn't you? No, I did not.

You said you were a domestic servant. Where you are living have you not an interest in the business?—Yes. So I have.

Did he not write a letter on one occasion, breaking off the engagement?—Yes. You have told the gentleman there was no engagement. Were you about to married about Christmas this year?—No, I was not.

In answer to the jury, witness said she did not want a half day off, because she did not feel safe.

The Coroner: What is the meaning of that?

By the jury: Were you aware he was carrying a revolver? Yes.

The Coroner: Why did you think it was not safe? Because he had not been himself for a good while.

You think mentally? Yes.

You are quite entitled to think so. Had you seen a revolver on him? — Yes. When? — About April.

The father said knew about the revolver. His son bought it some time ago, when there was a gang of fellows going about committing assaults on parties that were courting.

To the jury Miss Searby said the young man had never threatened her; but she was afraid of him, because she had her doubts.

The Coroner at this stage drew attention to a letter which the police officer said had obtained from the park keeper. It read as under:

It is with feelings both of shame and regret that I pass thus ignobly from the stage of life. It is my wish that Mr. Stephens perform all the necessary ceremonies attached thereto, and that the choir be asked to sing my favourite hymn. "Lead kindly light." With love to all from Heber.

The father said the letter was his son's handwriting. He was a member of the Unitarian Church choir.

Police-constable James Gillie deposed to hearing of the finding of the cap at 8 o'clock on Saturday night. He dragged the water and found the body. The public thoroughfare was 200 yards off. In the clothing was 18s. in money and a silver watch, a revolver loaded in every chamber, spectacles etc.

The Coroner, in summing up, said there was no doubt the poor fellow had committed suicide. As to his state of mind they had only the evidence as to his disappointment with the girl, not with Gerty. This appeared to have made a very great impression upon him. There was nothing else before them

to account for it. It was just possible there might have been more taken place with the girl than she had told them about. She was not very fond of telling them more than she was asked about. There was nothing else offered to them to account for it further than his disappointment in connection with the girl, and he thought he was reading the opinion and evidence of the father correctly when he said that was his (the father's) view as well. It was a little thing to cause a healthy young man of 23 to commit suicide.

The father said his son was a steady lad and had been a teetotaler all his life.

The jury returned a verdict of "Suicide during a state of temporary insanity."

The expenses of the witness Searby were disallowed.

It will be seen from the above that the people of Wentworth were well used to deaths occurring in what we would now regard as unusually tragic circumstances; but the following case would have been regarded as - to say the least - unfortunate in any age. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for Friday 3 December 1909 reported:

### **DISCLOSURES AT WENTWORTH INQUEST**

At the inquest at the Rockingham Arms, Wentworth, on the body of Sarah Ann Robinson (55), wife of Robert Robinson, labourer, Wentworth, worth, there were some shocking disclosures. Mrs. Robinson died last Monday. It transpired that she had suffered for the last nine months from an ulcerated leg, and that on Thursday last she became ill with bronchitis. She refused to have a doctor. On the day of her death a neighbour called in Dr. Barr, but she was beyond his aid. He had made a post-mortem examination, and told the Coroner and jury that the body was fairly well nourished. There were ulcers on both legs of old standing. Death was due to fatty degeneration of the heart. If he had been called in sooner he did not think he could have prolonged life. He described the body as covered with lice bites. The husband said the deceased had not had a doctor for 20 years. She had slept downstairs, and he occupied upstairs room. He could not help the lice bites. She was master, and he could nothing with her. The jury returned a verdict of "Death from fatty degeneration of the heart."