

**DANGER OF LONG-DISTANCE SWIMMING
DEATH OF MR. HAROLD BALDWIN**

A very painful impression was created in the town on Saturday night last when it became known that Mr. Harold BALDWIN, of Hazlemere, Argyll Street, had died suddenly at the Boathouse of the Ryde Rowing Club, after a prolonged swim. Mr. BALDWIN, who was only 20 years of age, was one of the most popular members of the Ryde Rowing Club, and one of the most athletic. In particular he was a fine swimmer and at different times during the past year or two had accomplished some very long distances. At the end of last year he conceived the idea of emulating the feats of some of those who have attempted to swim the channel. He happened to mention this to Dr. BUCK, who had attended him all his life, and Dr. BUCK at once dissuaded him from undertaking anything of the kind, pointing out that long distance swimming was the most exhausting form of exercise that could be indulged in, and telling him that his constitution was not sufficiently strong. Mr. BALDWIN, who was a finely built young man, could not believe that what he accomplished without distress could be so harmful to him, and with the vigour and earnestness of his period of life commenced to train for the great feat, on the accomplishment of which he had set his heart. On Saturday afternoon he went to the boathouse with several companions, and diving overboard, he actually swam to King's Quay and back, his companions accompanying him in a boat. This is a long swim, being close on eight miles, and further, the temperature of the water was below the average for the time of the year. He re-entered the boat about a quarter of a mile from the pier apparently quite well. He climbed into the boat without assistance, and on reaching the slipway of the pier he assisted to pull the boat up. Some minutes later he was sitting on the lockers when he fell forward unconscious. Assistance was rendered by other members of the club and medical aid telephoned for, but he passed away in a very short time. The sudden death of one of the most popular members created a very painful impression on the club, and in the town generally the news was heard with genuine regret. Late in the evening the body was removed to the home of his mother in Argyll Street.

The inquest was held at the Police Station, Ryde, on Tuesday morning before the acting Coroner (Mr. James ELRIDGE).—Councillor TEAGUE was elected foreman of the jury.

George Edgar BALDWIN, said both he and his brother lived with their mother. On Saturday witness went with his brother, Mr. HARTOPP, Mr. NEWBALD, Mr. SWEETMAN, to the boathouse of the Ryde Rowing Club. That would be about 2.15. It was the intention of deceased to go for a long swim. He was a good swimmer, and had swum long distances before. They all went into a boat, and when about 100 yards from the pier his brother dived over and swam to King's Quay, the other side of Wootton, and back. Deceased swam strongly and made no complaint. He took a little bovril while in the water. When about half a mile from the Rowing Club slipway deceased got into the boat, rubbed himself down and put on his rowing clothes. Deceased was in the water three and a quarter hours. When they got to the slipway deceased seemed alright, and assisted to pull the boat up. Deceased had a shower bath. Witness dressed and left his brother having a rub-down. That would be at ten minutes past six. Deceased was quite on friendly terms with everyone at the Club. Witness could not account for deceased's collapse. Deceased had only been for three long swims this season, and had swum much longer distances.

The Coroner: What made him do this? – Witness: He was going to try to swim the Channel.

The Coroner: When did he first think of doing that? – Witness: About two months ago.

By the Foreman: Deceased had never swum from Portsmouth to Ryde, but he had started. He was never unwell after leaving the water.

Thomas William HARTOPP, 47 West Street, said he was in the boat accompanying deceased on Saturday. Witness did not notice anything the matter with deceased when they returned to the Pier. Deceased climbed into the boat without assistance. After the swim deceased was sitting on the locker dressing himself, when he suddenly fell to the ground. Seeing his face was black witness called the boatman, Mr. FORD, and together they tried to restore animation. Deceased gave two heavy breaths and then lay quiet. A doctor was telephoned for, and various members of the Club did what they could to render first aid. Immediately before deceased fell he appeared to be very well indeed.

Dr. J. J. EYRE, acting as locum teneus for Dr. PRIDMORE, said on Saturday evening at 6.35 he received a telephonic message to go to the boathouse to see a young man who had taken in a fit. He went,

and on examination found life extinct. A number of persons were rubbing the limbs. The body was tranquil in appearance, and there was no signs of violence. He had never met with a similar case of death after drowning. He formed the opinion that deceased died from a congestion of the brain, produced by prolonged exposure to cold water.

The Coroner: Do you know what was the temperature of the water on this day? – No, but I was in the water on the previous day and found it distinctly cold.

The Coroner: Do you think these long swims advisable? – On the contrary I think them most inadvisable, particularly in this climate.

Deceased's brother, in answer to the Coroner, said that on this day deceased said that the water was quite cold.

Dr. EYRE said the water must have been too cold for such a long swim. He was a swimmer himself, and knew what was required of anyone.

Dr. T. A. BUCK, M.B. Lond., said he had known deceased lad all his life, and he had been frequently under his (Dr. BUCK's) care for various illnesses, which he attributed to a tuberculous constitution. A year ago---in July 1906, he operated on him for a tuberculous abscess. During his convalescence he announced his intention of endeavouring to swim the Channel. He distinctly told the deceased that he must not think of it; that his chest was not good enough; and that if he persisted he would probably kill himself.

The Coroner: Did you use words as plain as that? –Dr. BUCK: I did, and I told his mother so as well. I was a great swimmer myself when I was young, and I know what is required of a man who swims a long distance.

Continuing Dr. BUCK said he last saw deceased in January, when he considered his lung area was diminished.

The Coroner: Do you think the distance he swam had a prejudicial effect upon him? – Dr. BUCK: I am amazed that he was able to continue so long in the water, and I think that such a swim as that he took would most likely bring about a collapse.

The Coroner: Do you agree Dr. EYRE as to the cause of death? –Dr. BUCK: For my own part I should be inclined to think he broke some blood vessel either in his heart or his lungs, which suffocated him. I think it was the sudden giving way of something consequent upon the prolonged overtire.

Coroner: When you warned him as to the probable result of undertaking the Channel swim what reply did he make? – Dr. BUCK: He said nothing; he was rather obstinate. He was very anxious to swim the Channel, and I am not surprised at his persisting. Young men like to do what they have made up their minds to attempt.

A Juror: Has there been a post mortem examination?

The Coroner said he had been in somewhat of a dilemma. In the ordinary way either Mr. F. A. JOYCE or himself would have ordered a post-mortem, and in that case it would have been carried out by Dr. EYRE. If that had been done they would have scarcely have been justified in calling upon Dr. BUCK to give evidence. When, therefore, he telephoned to Dr. BUCK and heard what evidence he would give, he thought the jury would prefer to hear Dr. BUCK, who had attended deceased all his life, rather than to have had a statement from another doctor as to the exact cause of death. Dr. BUCK had told them just the kind of young man deceased was, and his evidence had therefore been most valuable. Everyone must most deeply regret this very unfortunate affair coming almost at the beginning of the season. As they had heard in the evidence, this poor young man lost his life through an anxiety to make himself proficient in swimming in order that he might attempt to swim the Channel, and thus to emulate others who had more stamina and stronger constitution than he had. Efforts of endurance such as this was, almost always had a detrimental effect on those who attempted them. In this case Dr. BUCK had strongly dissuaded the lad from undertaking anything of the sort, but with the confidence of youth he was determined to carry out what he desired, instead of profiting as he should have done by the doctor's warning. It was evident that the water must have been very cold, and this, coupled with the extraordinary strength required to swim such a distance, acted on a constitution not sufficiently strong to withstand the effort. It was fortunate that they had the advantage of evidence from doctors who were both swimmers. He thought it was desirable that it should be known that swimming was one of the most laborious and exhausting exercises a man could go in for, and to continue it in cold water for a long period was a thing greatly to be deprecated. He thought they were all grieved at the sad end of the young man, cut off in the full strength of his young manhood.

The jury found that death was due to collapse following upon long exposure to the cold water.

The Foreman said he was desired by the jury to say how deeply they sympathised with the friends of this young man who was known to most present, and who was generally liked. The news of his death was received in the town with great regret. The Foreman added that he hoped the Press would give prominence to the remarks of the medical men as to the danger of long-distance swimming.

Researched by
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