

1861 CENSUS: RG9/657. folio 28. page 27.  
Abode: Blenheim House, Spencer-road, Ryde, IW.

Anthony W. CAWS. Head. M. 49. Shoemaker. St Helens, IW.  
Elizabeth CAWS. Wife. M. 43. Bitterne, South Stoneham, Hants.  
John E. CAWS. Son. 11. Scholar. St Helens, IW.  
Charles CAWS. Son. 9. Scholar. St Helens, IW.  
Martin CAWS. Son. 7. Scholar. St Helens, IW.  
**Elizabeth M. E. CAWS. Dau. 5. St Helens, IW.**

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ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS 14 Nov 1931. page 5.

### **SERIOUS FIRE AT RYDE ELDERLY LADY'S DEATH IN BURNING BED-ROOM**

The most serious outbreak of fire in Ryde during recent years was discovered shortly before midnight on Tuesday and unhappily, resulted in the death of Miss Elizabeth Mary Eugenie CAWS, aged 75, an occupant of the top bed-room of Glen Cottage, a small tenement situated at the back of some houses in Hill-street. Mrs Kathleen BEAZLEY, a widow, aged 60, the other occupant of the bottom floor, was rescued in an exhausted and distressed condition.

It appears that about 11.45pm. a boy named Roy WADDON, of 47a St. John's-road, was in High-street, near the London Hotel, when he saw flames coming from the house and heard the screams of women. He at once raced to the Police-station and informed P.S. DOBSON. Having rung for the Fire Brigade the officer at once dashed to the scene and found Mrs. BEAZLEY, who had evidently returned to the building to recover some of her possessions, almost paralysed with fright owing to the partial collapse of the ceiling, which had caused the bedstead in the top room to hang down into her room below. After removing her to safety the sergeant then made several gallant attempts to get to the bed-room above. With the aid of a handkerchief across his face he tried to rush up the staircase, but the heat and the smoke drove him back, and as no sound came from overhead it seemed apparent that Miss CAWS was already dead from suffocation. The Fire Brigade, in charge of Chief-Officer JOLLIFFE and Second-Officer WILLIAMS, were on the scene about ten minutes after receiving the call. The upper floor of the building was then well alight and several firemen, wearing smoke helmets, at once rushed up the staircase, where it was discovered that the bed-room door was bolted inside. The escape ladder was run up to the window, but the flames and smoke over-powered Fireman LANGDON, who was caught in his fall by Chief-Officer JOLLIFFE and recovered after receiving attention. With the aid of a crowbar the bed-room door was broken open and a glance at once told the would-be rescuers that the old lady was beyond human aid. Owing to the floor joist in the room below having been badly burned it was impossible to venture far into the room for fear of the floor collapsing, so with great rapidity the firemen strutted up the remains of the wrecked ceiling in order to recover the body. It was then found that one side of deceased had been badly charred, but the general appearance of the body suggested that death had mercifully intervened before the flames reached her. There were no signs of a struggle, as she lay where she had fallen, or rolled off her bed, the head part of which had sunk through the floor. The body was removed to the mortuary by P.C. TURNBULL and the firemen. It was two hours before the brigade could subdue the outbreak. Next morning a dead cat was found behind a box near the door of the bed-room occupied by Miss CAWS. The poor creature had apparently died from suffocation, as there were no marks of burning on his fur.

The building is a 2-roomed cottage with a wash-house, the property of Mr. A.ATTRILL, of Lower Bettesworth-road. It had been rented by Miss CAWS for some years and she sublet the lower room. The fire is believed to be due to an overturned lamp which was found in Miss CAWS's room, which also contained large bundles of books and papers. Mrs BEAZLEY was cared for by neighbours

during the night and subsequently removed to the Isle of Wight Infirmary suffering badly from shock. Miss CAWS was a very familiar figure in the town, where her early Victorian type of dress and somewhat precise demeanour attracted attention, although she was very quiet and reserved.

#### THE INQUEST.

Yesterday (Friday) an inquiry into the tragic affair was conducted in the Primitive Methodist School by the Deputy Coroner (Francis A. JOYCE, Esq.). Supt. J.SALTER represented the police.

The Coroner intimated that Mrs BEAZLEY was still an inmate of the I.W. Infirmary and would be unable to attend. She had made a statement to P.S. DOBSON which he proposed to have read, but it would not be primary evidence. If after hearing that and the witnesses, they would like Mrs BEAZLEY to give evidence, he would adjourn the inquiry until she was able to attend.

Donald WHEELER, tobacconist and confectioner, of 107 High-street, Ryde, identified the body as that of his aunt, who had lived in the cottage for about eight years. She was very active for her age and in full possession of her faculties. She was a little eccentric and at times would buy things and store them up. He saw her on Tuesday, when she said she was not feeling very well. He advised her to see a doctor, but she replied "Doctors kill you". She told him she was going to get a bottle of "medicine", by which he inferred that she was going to get brandy. She was not addicted to drink, but when unwell she always took a little brandy instead of doctor's medicine.. She had been warned by many people of the filthy and littery state of her room. She was very religious.

Roy WADDON, butcher's errand boy, of 47a St. John's-road, stated that at 11.45pm. on Tuesday he was near the London Hotel, High-street, when he heard a woman shout "Help! Fire! " and he ran to the Police-station and gave the alarm.

May WEBB, wife of Alfred WEBB, of 76 Swanmore-road, said she was in bed when her daughter shouted that there was a fire at Mrs BEAZLEY's. She jumped up, opened the window, and called for help. She put on a coat and went out. When she saw Mrs BEAZLEY, whom she told to keep outside the house while she fetched assistance. When she returned P.S. DOBSON was there and the Fire Brigade arrived shortly afterwards. She knew deceased slept upstairs and went to bed very early. There was always a light in deceased's room and she told witness that in the winter she burned a fire all night. Witness added that she took Mrs BEAZLEY into her house for the night. She told witness that she went to bed about 7 o'clock, woke about 9, and lay awake as she thought she could smell something burning. She shouted to deceased, but got no answer. Mrs BEAZLEY also said that she heard something trickling down the walls. When a piece of the ceiling fell into her room she went outside and saw the curtains burning directly under deceased's bed-room. She knew deceased kept her bed-room door locked and the windows shut because she had told her she had a horror of someone going to get in. Mrs BEAZLEY was a cripple and could not get up the stairs. Witness suggested that deceased's cat might have jumped off the bed when the thunder sounded and knocked the lamp over. The deceased was in the habit of going to bed to read. She would not allow any one to go into her room. She had a lot papers and stuff there. – The Coroner: Had the sanitary inspector ever seen the place? – Witness said she asked the inspector to view the place three years ago, but he said he could do nothing.

P.S. DOBSON said he was at the Police-station at 11.50pm., when the witness WADDON gave the alarm. He summoned the Fire Brigade and went to the house at once, the two rooms being then in flames. He came to the conclusion that the fire originated in the upper room, which was practically enveloped in flames. After getting Mrs BEAZLEY out he tried to get deceased out. He tried to go up the stairs with a wet handkerchief, but the flames and smoke were too great. The brigade arrived at 12.5, and after the outbreak had been subdued they found the deceased's body badly charred, lying on her left side. Part of the floor near the bed had collapsed. The bed-room door was locked and the window closed. The room was filled with bundles of stuff, papers, rags, &c. He found a "Beatrice" oil stove lying on its side close to the bed and the stopper was missing. An oil lamp, which had apparently been placed on the remains of a chair, had fallen to the floor and lay near the stove. Mrs BEAZLEY, a widow, aged 60, said she had been residing there for 60 years. She said deceased was active for her

age and attended to her own requirements and went out daily in the mornings. On Tuesday she saw her go out shopping at 10am. She came back at 12 the worse for drink and went straight to her room. The last time she saw her alive was at 3 o'clock, when she called "Good Night" to her. She then retired for the night, which was her daily practice. She (Mrs BEAZLEY) retired at 7pm and went to sleep. She awoke at 9pm., but could hear no sound in the room above. When she next awoke she smelt burning and heard what appeared to be water dripping from the ceiling of her room. At the same moment some of the ceiling fell and she saw the flames coming through into her room. She put on her mackintosh and went outside where she saw that the room above was a mass of flames. She shouted to deceased, but got no reply. She went back into the house to get clothes and remembered no more until some hours later. Deceased always burned an oil stove in her room at night and she had many times asked her not to do so, as it was dangerous.

The Coroner said he thought the inference was too strong to reject such a statement, and the jury agreed.

Dr. L.P.L.Firman EDWARDS said he examined the body at the mortuary. Deceased had been extensively burned on her left side and the hand and leg were completely charred. He thought she died from suffocation.

The Coroner said there was no doubt that this unfortunate old person died from burning, but the cause of the fire was not exactly evident. In view of the state of the room it was not at all surprising that if a slight fire originated it would rapidly involve the whole room. One could understand that under those circumstances the old lady died of suffocation, which would quickly result, otherwise she would have smashed the window or opened the door and tried to escape, but she was probably asleep at the time. It was one of those unfortunate results of very old people living alone. Dealing with people in their own homes was very difficult. English people regarded their home as their sanctuary, and the consequence was that old people preferred to live their own lives. That old lady lived her own life and ran a risk which had ended fatally. He was quite sure that the people round did what they could in the sad circumstances. Mrs WEBB very kindly rendered assistance and Sergt. DOBSON very promptly got Mrs BEAZLEY out. The Fire Brigade also came very promptly. He suggested to the jury that their verdict should be "Accidental burning by reason of a fire in her room, which was probably originated from an oil stove." This the jury accepted and the foreman (Mr. H.SMITH), in expressing sympathy with the relatives, commended the actions of Mrs WEBB, P.S. DOBSON, the boy WADDON, the Fire Brigade, and P.C. TURNBULL, who had assisted during the fire.