

FRIENDS DESCRIBE FATAL MISHAP

A verdict of accidental death by drowning was recorded by the Portsmouth deputy city coroner, Mr. O. G. PARKER, at an inquest at Portsmouth Law Courts on Friday week on **John Henry GIBBS**, aged 30, of 30 West-street, Ryde. He died on August 26th while on a fishing expedition with two friends off Ryde.

George Albert Philip BRIDLE, of 43 Argyll-street, Ryde, said he went on a fishing expedition in a boat belonging to John GIBBS and himself on the night of August 26th. A friend Kenneth GREEN, was with them and they left Battery Shore between 8 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. in a 10ft.6in fibre class dinghy, designed for fishing. They anchored about half-an-hour later on a mark 100 yards north of a radar beacon stick about half-a-mile off Puckpool. Witness said he had been fishing all his life and had quite a bit of boat experience as a naval coxswain. He had been put to this mark too many times to count. They were confident about the waters in which they were fishing and the sea was as calm as a millpond. They carried with them in the boat a pressure lamp, gear, oars, tackle, bait and clothes. They were fishing for conger and skate and he hooked a conger of about 30lb.

Describing what happened subsequently, BRIDLE said it took a long time to get the conger into the boat, as it was on a thin line. GIBBS gaffed it with a hook and, as the conger came into the boat, the head and tail were free to move around. The head lashed suddenly round towards GIBBS, who moved quickly to avoid it. This put the boat out of order as he and GREEN also fell back, and the boat turned over. He could feel that GIBBS was tangled up in the line and the eel was also still on the line. GIBBS shouted he had got the line round him – he was struggling in the water only about three feet away. There was only very faint moonlight and witness told GREEN to stay with the boat. Witness got his own boots off as soon as he was in the water. GIBBS could swim, but the combat jacket he was wearing tended to get waterlogged and would have made it more difficult. He tried to help GIBBS out of his jacket but as he did so they both seemed to sink, as they were both waterlogged. They were about 200 yards from the boat by this time so he tried to reach the radar stick. GIBBS called out to them that he could not make it, and kept coming up and going under again. The third time he pushed BRIDLE away and said “You think of the kids.” He went under again and did not reappear.

Witness was pulled into a dingy with two men, who had come to their assistance and they went to pick up GREEN. They made a search to see where the tide might have taken GIBBS before they went to Ryde Pier to get help.

Ernest Thomas HULCOOP, of 25 Highland House, Wharncliffe-road, Woolston, Southampton, said he was fishing in his cabin cruiser with friends off Ryde. About midnight he went outside to stretch his legs and heard some splashing. Someone shouted “I can’t make it.” This was about 500 yards from the cruiser. He got into the cruiser’s dinghy with one of his friends and as the moon struck across the water they saw a head.

It was Mr. BRIDLE, and they pulled him into the dinghy and then found the upturned dinghy and got the other man (GREEN) in. They made a wide search for about an hour and a quarter and then went to Ryde pier to summon help.

Thomas Joseph SMITH, of 13 Alexander Green, Fareham, a boatswain, gave evidence of finding the body after taking an officer to an Argentinian ship in St. Helens Roads, in an M.F.C.

Dr. Michael ANDREWS, pathologist, said a post mortem examination indicated that death was due to drowning.

The coroner recorded that GIBBS died from drowning despite the combined efforts of his friends in trying to save him.
