

**RYDE TUNNEL FATALITY.  
RAILWAYMAN KILLED BY FALL  
FROM TRAIN.**

The Deputy Coroner (F. A. JOYCE, Esq.) conducted an inquest at the Primitive Methodist School, Ryde, on Tuesday, on the body of **Arthur CHILDS**, 38, a linesman's assistant employed by the Southern Railway, who was fatally injured as the result of falling from a train in the Esplanade tunnel on Sunday. Mr. R. PROUDFOOT represented the Southern Railway and Mr. E. BROWNING (Southern District organising secretary) appeared for the National Union of Railwaymen and for the widow.

Henry CHILDS, retired linesman, of 67 Swanmore-road, Ryde, father of the deceased, said his son, who resided at 66 Swanmore-road, had been employed as linesman's assistant for 23 years. He had been in the habit of travelling in the railway vans.

Frank RODAWAY, of 2 Landscape-view, Gunville-road, Carisbrooke, a signalman linesman employed by the Southern Railway, said that on Saturday he was employed with deceased and two other men – Messrs. JACOBS and DUKES – on night duty at Ryde Pier-head in dismantling the signal department. They left work on Sunday at 10.30 a.m. and got into the 11.15 a.m. train for Newport at the Pier-head. Deceased's destination was St. John's-road Station. They had often travelled together in the same van. On this occasion they got into the guard's van, next but one from the engine. Deceased was leaning back against the door. Witness did not see the guard fasten the door after they got in. This door was opposite the one from which CHILDS fell. Somebody fastened the door on the east side, however. While passing through the tunnel between the Esplanade and St. John's-road they were all chatting together. Witness turned to speak to JACOBS and some one shouted "Oh, my mate's gone." Witness did not see CHILDS fall out. There was just a feeble electric light in the van at the time. There were two sections to the door from which CHILDS fell. One opened inwards and the other outwards, and both depended upon the locking-bar being open, which released both when the handle was turned. At the time of the accident the train was on the point of running into St. John's-road Station, and when it had stopped they ran back together to find CHILDS. No other train had passed. There was a brake in the van. He did not know how to communicate with the guard except by pulling the communication cord. – In answer to Mr. BROWNING, witness said that they were travelling as passengers and had nothing to do with working the train. He did not know which parts of the door were open. Had there been any noise they could not easily have heard it on account of the rattle of the train in the tunnel and the milk-churns.

Alfred JACOBS, of Beatrice-avenue, Adelaide-road, East Cowes, a smith in the employ of the railway, said he had been working with the other three men at Ryde Pier-head. On passing through the tunnel witness was sitting in a recess of the van, facing the St. John's end of the tunnel. As the light began to appear he remembered hearing a rustle and he saw DUKES on his feet at the doors. He exclaimed "Gracious – your mate, RODAWAY." He did not see CHILDS disappear. As far as he could remember DUKES was pulling one door to, and the other was still open. He heard no shout or scream and was unable to give any alarm until they had reached St. John's-road. He and the other two men immediately ran back and found CHILDS lying on his back between the railway line and the tunnel. He died as they lifted him up. A train passed on the other line. The door was fastened after them on the east side, but he could not say whether the other was. He did not know whether the lever controlling both doors was up or down. This controlled the door which opened outwards, and

the handle worked independently. After removing the body witness took immediate steps to find a doctor and informed the hospital.

Edward DUKES, labourer employed by the Southern Railway, of 2 Highland-cottages, Newport, said he caught one swift glance and saw CHILDS fall backwards through the doors. Both were swinging open and witness fastened them. Deceased looked out of the window at the Esplanade, but witness could not say exactly when he began to lean against the door. He thought CHILDS had his hands behind him, but could not swear to it. He did not notice any wriggling as if CHILDS was playing with the door handle. A pair of overalls produced, having a long tear in the seat, belonged to deceased, but witness could not say if they became caught in the locking-bar.

It was stated that the overalls were practically new and there was no tear in them when deceased left home on Saturday night. A brown and white brick mark close to the tear suggested that CHILDS had struck the wall; of the tunnel in falling.

Replying to the Coroner, DUKES said it was quite possible to release the door by playing with the handle and having the bar in one's hand. They had often travelled in that kind of van before and usually closed the door themselves on entering, but did no trouble to see if the other door was locked.

George EVES, guard employed by the Southern Railway, stationed at Newport, said he was on duty on the 11.15 a.m. train from Ryde to Newport on Sunday. He knew nothing of the accident until he reached Whippingham. His attention was not directed to the three men after the accident. He went to the van at the Esplanade Station to put on the lights and saw three men in it, but not the fourth. It was the second journey the van had made that day, having started from Newport to Ryde at 7.30 a.m. The last occasion on which he entered the van was on the up journey at the Esplanade, at 10.30p.m., when he fastened the doors. He did not touch the lever at all, but fastened the door with the brass handle on the side on which deceased fell out. The other was all right. There was no occasion to open the van on arrival at the Pier-head. He did not know whether anybody else opened it. When the train left the Pier-head he did not go to see if the van had been opened. His inspection of the van would be finished at the Esplanade. The milk-churns were loaded at the Pier-head on the east side, and there would be no occasion for anybody to open the opposite door, as the other line intervened between the door on the west side and the other platform. Witness had not found that the doors opened too easily. When properly closed it would be impossible for them to fall open unless the handle was turned.

By Mr. BROWNING: It was the practice of railwaymen when trains intervened between platforms to get through the compartment of one train into another, opening the door farthest from the platform. This, however, could not apply because no other train intervened at Ryde Pier-head. It was a possible theory that if one door had been left unfastened, with the oscillation of the train and the jerking of defendant, standing up whilst taking a sharp bend in the tunnel, he might have clutched the handle behind to steady himself and so jerked both doors open.

Dr. L. Firman EDWARDS said he saw deceased at the mortuary on Sunday evening. He had been dead some hours. Witness found two wounds on the head, one over the right eye, and a large severe wound on the left side at the back of the head. The skull was fractured at the base. This was sufficient to account for death and was consistent with the fall described. There was a wound on the left shoulder corresponding with a large rip in the jacket produced. Witness surmised that after falling from the van deceased hit the side of the tunnel with his shoulder and struck his head either on the line or on the ground. Death was almost instantaneous.

Albert BENNETT, railway signal and telegraph inspector of Eastleigh, said he had examined the van from which the accident occurred. The system of door fastening had been

in existence for a great many years and was extensively used on the Southern Railway. Witness had 35 years' experience. Had the door been left open on the journey from Ryde Pier the signalman would have been on the look out, and would have given the necessary signal.

The Coroner said he felt so much doubt about the matter that he was unable to accept any theory. His verdict would be an open one as to the exact manner in which the accident was caused. Several theories had been advanced, but there was no evidence on which he could return a positive verdict. There was no evidence attaching blame to the guard or blaming in any way the three companions of deceased. He was at first inclined to criticise the non-application with the guard, but little would have been gained had the men been able to do so as St. John's Station was almost reached. Whether the Westinghouse brake was applied or not little time was lost in going to the man's aid. Everybody regretted this unexpected accident. He would return a verdict of "Accidental death."

Mr. PROUDFOOT expressed regret and sympathy with the family on behalf of the Southern Railway, and Mr. BROWNING associated himself with the remarks of the Company's representative.

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Researched & typed by  
Ann Barrett  
Margaret Truckel