

## SHOCKING FATALITY DEATH OF MR. ARTHUR W. FOWLES

Quite a gloom has been cast over the town by the death of Mr. **A. W. FOWLES**, the well-known marine artist, of George-street, Ryde, under circumstances as peculiar as they are painful. A hard worker and a diligent student of nature in her varied aspects, Mr. FOWLES was often on the Pier or on the shore gathering the materials for his pictures, and on Thursday afternoon he took advantage of a tolerably fine day to pay a visit to Fishbourne in order to make some sketches of the yachts and scenery there. He was accompanied by his son, a little fellow of about seven years of age, and the pair were seen passing the office of this paper, apparently in excellent health and spirits; the elder of the two, alas! Never to return again alive. The information which we have been able to gather is rather contradictory, but what occurred seems to have been this.

Mr. FOWLES went up the creek a little way and made a sketch of a yacht. A mariner by the name of FRY, a resident of Haylands, seems to have been down there at the same time, partly on business connected with a yacht, and partly wildfowl shooting. He had a gun with him for this purpose, and in order to have it ready when wanted, he placed it loaded against a wooden stage, which is built on the rather muddy shore there, to enable persons to get on board some of the yachts. While Mr. FOWLES was engaged in his work the little boy with him played about, and seems to have espied the gun. He lifted it up, and must have manipulated the lock unobserved by his father, for the gun went off, and the charge striking Mr. FOWLES' head inflicted such a serious wound on the temple that death, according to the opinion of the medical gentlemen, must have been almost instantaneous.

The melancholy news was quickly conveyed to Ryde, and Dr. RICH and Mr. WOODWARD were soon on the spot, with Mr. F. FOWLES, but nothing could, of course, be done, except to convey the body to the Coastguard Station close by, there to await an inquest. Till the Coroner has investigated the matter, and explained what now appears somewhat mysterious, it would be rash to give any opinion on the case. Only the previous evening Mr. FOWLES, in capital health and spirits and displaying an amount of vitality surprising in one who had reached three-score years and ten, was at the annual dinner of the Pier Company's employés, and gave them some few reminiscences of his earlier days. The sad event is naturally the one topic of conversation.

Mr. FOWLES' reputation as an artist was something more than local, and he was almost universally known amongst yachtsmen. Well acquainted with the sea, Mr. FOWLES' excelled in painting, the portraits of yachts, and in portraying the various incidents of yacht races. For facility of execution and correctness of detail he was acknowledged to be without rival in these parts, and these qualities were gained, not by academical training—for he was self taught—but by constant observation and study of nature. It was his boast that he had never had a lesson in his life, and under such circumstances his works were truly creditable. He believed himself to be an underrated man, and used to declare that his pictures would be more highly appreciated after his death. But Mr. FOWLES was not content with being a mere yacht portrait painter. He aspired to be something more, and it is only fair to say that, under the generous patronage of Mr. Vivian WEBBER, who gave him many commissions, he was able to execute a number of large pictures, which may be fairly styled historical, for they aimed to represent events of local interest. Five of these now adorn the Town Hall, Ryde, and several are hung at Newport, Southampton, Portsmouth, Shanklin, and other places. The best of these, in our humble judgment is "The Cambria winning the Town Cup," which now hangs in the Town Hall, Ryde, and which, in warmth of colouring, vigorous treatment, and action, is his *chef d'œuvre*. The "Laying of the Atlantic Cable" has also been praised, especially by those acquainted with the sea, but the "Sinking of the Royal George," also in the Town Hall, Ryde, illustrates Mr. FOWLES' strength and his weakness. Give him a sea scene with which he was familiar, and he would depict it with spirit and fidelity. But he was lacking in imagination, and his "Royal George" is tame and commonplace in consequence. His last work (now at Shanklin)

exhibits some evidence of waning powers, but indeed it is marvellous that Mr. FOWLES should have continued up to so late a period actively engaged every day in his avocation, and yet betraying so little weakness. Mr. FOWLES was twice married. By his first wife, he had a large family, nearly every member of whom inherited their father's talents—music, however, and not painting, being their study. Mr. FOWLES married a second time about eight years ago, and we regret to state has left a widow and four young children to mourn their loss.

## THE INQUEST

An inquest was held at the York Hotel, Ryde, on Friday evening, before the Deputy Coroner, E. F. BLAKE, Esq. The body, which had been removed to the home of the deceased, having been viewed by the jury, of which Mr. E. GROVES was foreman, the following evidence was taken:

Robert FRY deposed—I am a mariner, living at Haylands. Yesterday I went to Fishbourne to do some repairs to my boat. I took a gun with me, and got down there about 2 o'clock. Soon after 3 o'clock Mr. FOWLES came down on the stage. I was at that time in my boat with my back towards him. He spoke to me, and said, "Oh, Capt. FRY." I said, "Yes." He said he had come down to take a sketch of Mr. BARNES' little yacht. Almost immediately I heard the report of a gun, and found Mr. FOWLES had fallen from the stage into the water. Previously I had not faced the deceased, but stood talking to him and going on with my work at the same time. I jumped out of my boat on to the stage, and then for the first time saw the child standing on the stage with the gun in his hand. I at once took the gun away from him, and jumped into the water, and raised Mr. FOWLES' head. He was not dead, but was still breathing, but there was a large hole in the left side of his head. I got assistance from the Ermingarde, and we got him out of the water. Only three or four minutes afterwards he breathed his last. The child was standing not more than three yards from where his father was standing. The gun I took from him was my gun. It was a double-barrel one. I could not be certain whether, when I got into my boat, I put it in the stem of the little skiff that was lying close to the stern of my boat, or whether I laid it on the stage. Both barrels were loaded, and the locks were on half-cock. I am sure of that, I did not put it in my own boat, because I was working there with tools. I examined my gun afterwards, and found the right hand barrel had gone off, and the trigger of the other barrel was not full cocked. The gun could not have gone off unless some one had jerked the cock in some way. I did not see the child at first till I got out of the boat. I then saw that he was holding the gun in the ordinary manner in his hand.—

By the Jury: I fancy he must have drawn the gun from the stern of the boat and that in doing so the cock got hung up, and that gave it the necessary elevation to strike Mr. FOWLES. I could not see any other way in which it could be done.

The Coroner then said he should call the little boy and examine him, although he should not put him on his oath.

Edwin D. FOWLES deposed—I am six years old. I walked yesterday to Fishbourne with my father. When we got there we went down upon a stage, and father spoke to Mr. FRY. I knew Mr. FRY. While he was talking I saw a gun lying on the stage. I picked it up and I fired it off. I have had toy guns and have fired them off.

The gun was produced, and the charge having been drawn, the child showed how he picked it up and pulled the trigger,—I never touched the cock. Father was about six yards off. When I fired it I did not think about where the charge would go. I did not try to shoot my father. When the gun went off my father fell in a piece of water. He did not say anything. The gun did not kick out of my hand. Father did not see me take up the gun.

Dr. RICH, surgeon, of Ryde, said he was sent for yesterday afternoon and went with Mr. F. FOWLES to Fishbourne. Deceased was then lying on the landing stage, covered over. He was quite dead, and had evidently been so for 20 minutes. There was profuse bleeding from the left eye and the whole of the left side of the face. The left eyelids were lacerated as from a gunshot wound. The left eye was entirely gone. The upper and lower jawbones were both fractured. I could pass a

probe in several directions into the brain. The skin on the left temple had several perforations from the shot, all sloping towards the back of the head, and some perforating the skull. Death must have taken place in a very few moments.

The Coroner briefly summed up the evidence, and he felt little doubt, from the child's evidence that the gun was fully cocked, and he thought it was an indiscreet act on the part of FRY to leave the gun in such a position. The only excuse for his doing so was the fact that it was a place very little frequented. However, that was a point upon which the jury could decide.

The room was then cleared, and after an interval of some minutes the press and witnesses were re-admitted.

The Coroner then said that the jury had considered their verdict, and taking into consideration the whole of the evidence, they found that Mr. FOWLES had been accidentally shot by his son. At the same time they had considered whether some censure should not be passed upon FRY: however, after consideration, they had determined not to do so, but they must express the hope that after this accident FRY would be very careful about putting his gun out of harm's way. Although this was an unfrequented spot children might come even there.

Mr. FRY,—No one can feel deeper sympathy with the widow than I do.

The Coroner also remarked that FRY must have made a mistake about leaving the gun at half-cock. The little boy had given his evidence very clearly, and had showed them how it was done, and he thought it was the opinion of the jury that he could not have pulled back the hammer.

FRY.—I don't think it was at full cock.

The Coroner.—Well, you may be deceived. You did not know quite where you left the gun, you remember.

The Foreman said that Mr. FOWLES was an old inhabitant of the town, and very much respected, and the jury wished, through the Coroner, to express their deep sympathy with the family in the bereavement caused by this most distressing accident.

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ISLE OF WIGHT OBSERVER Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1883

### FUNERAL OF MR. A. W. FOWLES

The funeral of Mr. **Arthur Wellington FOWLES**, whose melancholy death we recorded in our last issue, took place amidst every mark of respect on Tuesday afternoon. The cortegé consisted of the hearse and four mourning coaches, the chief mourners being his widow, his sons Godwin, Frederick, Claude, and Arthur, his daughters Margaret and Mrs BROOKS, and Mr. and Mrs. Vivian WEBBER. Mr. FOWLES being one of the oldest members of the Loyal East Medina Lodge of Odd Fellows in this town, about 70 of the brethren followed, they having preciously met in their Hall where the funeral address was given. A number of the shops in the town were partially closed. The Vicar (Rev. A. POOLE) read the first portion of the service in the Parish Church, and afterwards proceeded to the Cemetery. The whole route of the procession was lined with people, and every mark of sympathy was expressed for the bereaved family. Several hundred persons had assembled in the Cemetery, which was reached about 4 o'clock. The coffin was covered with a handsome purple pall, on which were laid floral wreaths and crosses by relatives and friends. The service was read at the grave by the Vicar in a very impressive manner, and many present were moved to tears. Each of the brethren of his Lodge who followed, threw in a sprig of thyme on the coffin, as an emblem of esteem for their departed brother. Mr. FOWLES was 68 years of age. His widow and family have received, we hear, numerous letters of sympathy from all parts of the country.