

**89-YEAR-OLD RETIRED MINING
ENGINEER DIES IN SEAVIEW FIRE**

FLAT DESCRIBED AS DEATH TRAP

CORONER COMMENDS FIREMAN'S ACTION

The Coroner (Mr. J.V. BULLIN) recorded a verdict of accidental death at the inquest at Ryde Town Hall on Tuesday on **Rupert Clode HAILEY**, aged 89, a retired mining engineer, who lived alone in the top flat at Bermuda, Oakhill Road, Seaview. Mr. HAILEY lost his life when a fire occurred in his flat on Friday week. Ryde section of the County Fire Brigade were on the scene within seven minutes of being called by the occupant of the flat beneath Mr. HAILEY's, but when a fireman wearing a breathing apparatus entered the kitchen he found Mr. HAILEY dead.

A fire officer described the flat as a death trap, and the Coroner, in recording his verdict, said he sincerely hoped that when the property was reconstructed, steps would be taken to see that it was made safe, both as regards construction and the means of access and egress. The Coroner praised the brigade and all who helped.

DENSE SMOKE DELAYED ENTRY

Mary Nesta HAILEY, of 7 Windermere Close, Aylesbury, Bucks, said her father had been living alone in the flat since last August. When she last saw him in October he was in very good health.

Grace Ethel CHICK, of Under Oak, Oakhill Road, Springvale, said she saw Mr. HAILEY in Oakhill Road at about 2.30 p.m. on the day before the fire. – The Coroner told her, "I asked you to give evidence because I believe you were the last person to see him alive."

Edith Mary Ann HARRIS, of Flat 2, Bermuda, the first-floor flat, said Mr. HAILEY lived in the flat immediately above hers. She last heard him between 5.30 and 5.50 p.m., on Friday week. At about 6.12 p.m. she went to the post, and on returning at 6.20 p.m. her budgerigar was making a lot of noise, and she was horrified to see the ceiling alight in the corner of a room occupied by her daughter when she was home. She telephoned the fire brigade at 6.23 p.m., and threw a bucket of water over the bed under the burning ceiling. She fetched Mr. and Mrs. ASHCROFT the flat beneath, and Mr. PRITCHARD also arrived, but the smoke was too dense for them to get into Mr. HAILEY's flat. She did not know whether Mr. HAILEY was in the flat.

Desmond Alfred PRITCHARD, of North View, Oakhill Road, a corporation beach inspector, said he saw flames coming from the roof and tried to get into the flat, but was prevented by the smoke.

**FIREMEN USED BREATHING
APPARATUS**

Leading Fireman Donald Victor WILLIAMS, of Ryde Fire Station, said the brigade received a call at 6.23 p.m., and arrived at 6.30 p.m. Within half a minute of arriving they were told it was thought that someone was in the top flat. He and the station officer tried to enter the flat, but it was impossible without breathing apparatus. He was instructed to put on breathing apparatus, and while doing so he understood the station officer and two firemen tried to get in with a hose projecting a cone of water. Wearing breathing apparatus, he entered the flat, and found Mr. HAILEY seated in a chair in the kitchen, with fire burning on the floor on his left-hand side. He tipped the chair back with Mr. HAILEY in it, and pulled it towards the door, where other firemen wearing breathing apparatus, helped him to take Mr. HAILEY outside. There was a portable gas fire, and gas was escaping from a gas jet, but there were no flames coming from it, probably because it had been put out by the water from the hose.

Station Officer, Leonard George WILLIAMS, of Ryde, said that while the last witness was in the flat a 35ft ladder was raised to the roof, and a jet of water played from there. When Mr. HAILEY was brought out he did not think he was alive. He was badly burned, and all his clothes had been burned off. At .5 p.m. the fire was brought under control, and just at 10 p.m. the brigade left.

COMBUSTIBLE MATERIAL

Asked by the Coroner if he had any theory as to what caused the fire, Station Officer WILLIAMS replied that he thought the gas fire had ignited combustible material. There were papers and magazines in the corner at the seat of the fire, which had burned through the ceiling down on to the bedding in the flat beneath. It could be that Mr. HAILEY was reading and fell asleep and dropped his paper on the gas fire. There was a lot of combustible material about.

In reply to a further question, Station Officer WILLIAMS said the flat was a death-trap for a fire. It was constructed with concrete and timber, and there was only one exit. He was not satisfied with the means of exit.

Dr. P.D. SWINSTEAD (pathologist) said he carried out a post-mortem examination on Monday. He could find no evidence that Mr. HAILEY had had a heart attack or any sort of seizure that would cause him to collapse. He was badly burned, and had inhaled a quantity of smoke. His blood contained carbon monoxide. The cause of death was carbon monoxide poisoning and burns from the fire.

A WARNING TO OTHERS

Recording his verdict of accidental death, the Coroner said they would never know precisely what happened. Nothing would bring Mr. HAILEY back, but he hoped it would be a warning to others as to the great risk which could arise from portable fires of that nature and having combustible material in such a position that it could catch alight. Leading Fireman WILLIAMS should be commended on the way he had conducted himself in getting Mr. HAILEY out.

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