

ANOTHER SHOCKING FATAL ACCIDENT AT THE SLUICE.

The new sluice, which the Town Council are now constructing to drain the marshes to the east of the town, seems to be a most unfortunate undertaking. Before the subscription lists opened for the benefit of the widow and family of poor HARVEY (who was killed while working at the sluice a fortnight ago) have been closed another fatal accident has occurred at the same place. The sluice is arched over with concrete, which is laid on wet, and supported by woodwork. On Tuesday twelve or fourteen men were inside the sluice removing the supports from the crown of the arch, when a portion of the arch fell and buried four or five men beneath it. One poor fellow, named John LANGFORD, of Haylands, was killed immediately, and four other men, named William GIBBS, of Dore's-row, PERKISS, of Brunswick-st, JACKMAN, of Oakfield, and HOUSE, of Weeks, were all more or less injured — GIBBS very seriously. The injured men were conveyed to the Infirmary, and the body of poor LANGFORD to the mortuary house at the Cemetery.

The inquest was held by Mr. E. F. BLAKE (deputy coroner) late on Tuesday afternoon, at the Town-hall, and after viewing the body of LANGFORD, which was much bruised, the jury adjourned to the sluice, and examined the part where the accident had occurred. It was noticed that the crown of the arch instead of consisting of hard concrete, was so soft that it could be broken off with the hands.

The jury then returned to the Town-hall, when the following evidence was taken: —

Luke TYLER deposed that he lived at Haylands. On Tuesday morning he was at work in the sluice, knocking away the struts for the purpose of removing the centres (or supports). He had removed the struts down one side, and was commencing to knock them away of the other, when the top fell in, and he saw daylight directly. Deceased and four other men were buried. It was half -an-hour before deceased was extricated, and he was then quite dead. The top of the arch was formed of concrete 14 inches thick, and the part that fell had been up more than a month. Thought the accident was owing to the tram carriages shaking the arch at the time. The stuff fell and broke the woodwork in.

William GREGORY, mason, and employed by the Town Council as clerk of the works at the sluice, deposed that on Tuesday morning he was near the engine on the Esplanade, when he heard a noise, and on going to the spot found that the top of the arch of the sluice had fallen in. He could not see any of the men. After calling the other men to assist in extricating those buried, he ran for Mr. NEWMAN, the surveyor, and was absent about half-an-hour. When he returned he found they had just extricated deceased, but he was quite dead. The part of the arch which fell had been up since the 31st of August. The specifications stated that the crown of the arch should be concrete, composed of seven parts of shingle and sand to one of Cement.

By the jury.— I think the material of sufficiently good quality. I don't know why the woodwork was removed. The cement would harden quicker in summer than it would at this time of the year, but it would not be so strong afterwards. The longer it is setting the stronger it is. Seven, to one of cement, is as large a proportion as I have known used in work of this description. The sides of the sluice were made of blocks of concrete. The proportion in these was five to one of cement. They carted 14 or 15 loads of clay and placed on the crown of this arch, and he could not think of anything else which would have caused the accident. Did not think there was more than the just proportion of sand in the concrete. They measured it out by guess. I did not know they were going to move the centres from thie arches, or I should not have allowed them to be removed. I did not leave it to the discretion of the men to move the centres, but to Mr. GROVES (the contractor).

Mr. Francis NEWMAN, the borough surveyor, said he prepared the plans and specifications for the new sluice. The proportions that the concrete of the arch was to be composed of was seven to one. Considered that sufficiently strong. Had examined the material of which the arch was composed, and was surprised to find that it had not more cohesion at the end of a month. He could only account for the accident on the supposition that there was more sand than there ought to have been in the concrete— in other words, too little shingle. Should have thought the clerk of the works ought to know whether there was enough shingle or not. If sand were used a longer time ought to have been allowed to elapse before the centre was removed. He should have to reduce the concrete on the top of the arch that fell to its former elements before he could say positively whether there was too much sand in it. If they heaped a lot of cloy on the arch they ought to have given it a longer time to set.

By the Jury.— I think there was a little want of caution in not ascertaining whether the work was sufficiently set before removing the centre. That could have been ascertained by removing the earth at the top, and by careful observation. I think the centres ought to have been fixed with wedges, and by moving these wedges it could easily be seen whether the arch gave way or not. If there had been wedges this would not have been so likely to occur. Told the foreman a week or so ago that wedges must be used in future. That was when he noticed that wedges had not been used. The part of the arch which fell had been put up before that order was given. It was generally admitted that concrete was as strong as the very best brickwork. The formation of the centre was left to the discretion of the contractor.

John GROVES, mason, and brother of the contractor, said he had helped to make some of the arches, but he did not think he had anything to do with making the one that fell. He was there when it fell. It was then between 10 and 11 in the morning. They had moved three of these centres, and were removing the fourth. The centres were made in two pieces, and they were striking the part nearest the tramway. Witness was holding one of the struts, and a man went and loosened the other. All at once they heard something coming, and almost before they could look round he saw daylight. Did not know what else could have caused it but the shaking of the tramway.

By Mr. CUTLER (jury). — I don't remember your passing the sluice on the 1st of September, and saying there did not appear to be sufficient gravel in the concrete. No particular orders were given as to striking the centre. I went down, and said we might as well move some of the centres. TYLER, however, took a leading part.

The inquest was then adjourned till Friday, it being understood that Mr. NEWMAN, the surveyor, should examine and test the concrete in the meantime, assisted by two jurymen (Messrs, CUTLER and SAUNDERS), and give his opinion on that occasion as to its composition, and whether it contained a proper proportion of shingle.

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THE FATAL ACCIDENT AT THE SLUICE.

The adjourned inquest, touching the death of John LANGFORD, who was killed while working at the sluice, was held on Friday afternoon at the Town-hall. The interest taken in the case was shown by the fact that the room was crowded. Mr. FELTHAM, solicitor, of Portsmouth, watched the proceedings on behalf of Mr GROVES, the contractor; and Mr. G. P. JOYCE, of Newport, attended on behalf of the widow of the deceased.

Mr. F. NEWMAN, the borough surveyor, deposed that in accordance with the request of the jury he had tested a portion of the arch. On Wednesday they took down a section north of that which fell, and also one to the south. The removal was done in the presence of Mr. SAUNDERS, one of the jury. The portion of the northern section screened he found contained 16 measures of sand and cement (he could not separate the two), and 20 of shingle. That would represent, appropriately, 3½ parts of sand and 4½ parts of shingle. The southern section contained 17 parts of sand and cement, and 17 of shingle—half of each. In each of these samples there was a small portion of clay.

By Mr. FELTHAM.—I made out the specifications under which the contractor took this job. They state that all material shall be gauged under the superintendence of the clerk of the works, and no gauging to take place unless he were present. I knew that the clerk of the works would have to superintend at other parts of the work as well as this, so this was meant to meet that difficulty. I had not seen anything to complain of as to the quality of the material used, so much as that the work had not been got on with so fast as it ought to have been. I had the arch on the Esplanade tested yesterday with 6¼ tons, and found it perfectly sound. I can hardly say that part was composed of the same material as the part which fell in, and the others. If I had known what proportions had actually been used I should have objected to the southern arch.

By the Jury.—The contract did not specify Langston shingle. The specifications stated that the shingle was to be free from dirt or clayey matter, and great care must be taken that no dirt be mixed with it. I thought these conditions had been complied with up to the time of the accident. I now know they could not have been, because the concrete contains an undue proportion of sand and clay. It would be to the advantage of the contractor to use the sand he dug up, but not to any great extent. When the superintendence of the work was handed over to GREGORY, I did not feel myself responsible for matters of detail. If, when I

visited the place, I found improper materials being used, then, did I continue the clerk of the works in his position, I should consider myself responsible. Before the centres were removed I considered the place ought to be inspected. The clerk of the works ought to have been able to detect that there was too much sand, without measuring.

Alfred SIVELL, assistant surveyor, gave corroborative evidence as to the analysis of the concrete.

William GREGORY, re-called and examined by the jury said—I knew the men were gauging the cement out of my presence, but I did not complain to Mr. NEWMAN, who knew they were gauging it when I was away as well as I did. I had to superintend the whole of the work, and they were gauging cement in two places at once. How could I be in two places? I did not complain; it's out of my line. I never asked for a second clerk of the works, but it was impossible for one man to look to it all. I did not know the men were going to move the centres.

William GROVES, the contractor, was then called by Mr. FELTHAM, and deposed that up to the time of the accident he was carrying out the contract according to the specifications. In making the first arches they used the gravel they dug out of the trench with a small portion of Langston gravel. He continued to use the gravel he dug out, and discontinued the Langston gravel. The clerk of the works was fully aware that they were using the material they dug out. Nothing had ever been condemned under this contract. The specimens of gravel produced he thought quite fit for the purpose. He gave the order on Tuesday morning to strike down some centres.

Richard SAUNDERS, also called by Mr. FELTHAM, said he was a carpenter in the employ of Mr. GROVES, and he, with two men to assist him, had done all the work, that had been found necessary in making the sluice. He had had the striking of everything since the work began. Mr. NEWMAN on the first occasion directed that no struts should be removed under a fortnight. All the centres were longer than that. On the day the accident happened Mr. GROVES told him to strike four centres. To the best of his knowledge GREGORY knew what they were going to do. Witness made the first centres, having no orders about them, according to his judgment. He did not use wedges for the first arches, but as they were afterwards told to use them, they did so. He did not, however, find that they answered owing to his having made the centres in two pieces.

Henry BURT having given corroborative evidence.

The Coroner then summed up, observing that if the jury considered there was so much negligence as to make it criminal, they must return a verdict of manslaughter.

The jury, after the court had been cleared, deliberated for some time, and eventually returned the following verdict:—"That the said John LANGFORD, on the 1st day of October, in the year aforesaid, at the parish aforesaid, died from the effects of injuries, then and there received by him from the accidental falling in of a certain arch, forming part of a sluice, which was then and there being constructed, and that such falling in was caused by the improper material which had been used in making the same. And the jurors aforesaid, on their oaths aforesaid, do say that William GROVES, the contractor engaged in constructing the said sluice, was guilty of gross negligence in using such materials, and that he did not use sufficient precautions before removing the centres. And the jurors also consider that great negligence was displayed by Francis NEWMAN, the surveyor, and William GREGORY, the clerk of the works, in allowing improper material to be used in the construction of the said sluice."

With thanks for the transcription submitted by Tony Bevis

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