

A CHILD FATALLY BURNT AT OAKFIELD

An inquest was held by the Coroner (E.F. BLAKE, Esq.) At the Oakfield Inn on Saturday on the body of **Robert George MILLS**, aged 2 years of 31 High Street, Oakfield. ---Mr Henry WAITE was foreman of the jury. Ernest WOODFORD, 32 High Street, Oakfield, painter, said that on Good Friday, just after 6 o'clock, witness went out of his back door and down the garden. When half-way down, leaning over the pig-sty, he thought he heard a child cry, and he looked up and saw deceased in flames at the top of the garden. Witness went to it at once and put the flames out as quickly as he could. He called for the deceased's father, who came, and witness handed it to him, and he took the child indoors. Did not notice any fire, except on the child.

Mrs Alice MILLS, mother of the deceased, deposed that she saw the child about 10 minutes before the accident. It was in and out of the room in which witness was. Another little boy, aged 5, was with him. She left to go across the street to her mother's and was called back by the deceased father, who said the child had burnt himself. She had then only just got outside the gate. Witness went back at once. Her husband had deceased in his arms, but the fire was out. There were burns on the child's arms and face, and she applied linseed oil to them. Deceased's frock and pinafore were burnt. The doctor did not come that day, but a district nurse dressed the burns. Dr. BANKS came on Sunday morning and he had been attending it ever since. The child did not seem much worse. The doctor came each day and a nurse twice a day. The child died on Friday morning. Could not say how the child caught fire. About an hour after the child was burnt the other little one came in, with a toy candle such as were put on a Christmas trees. Could not say whether it had been ignited. Told the child to take it out and had not seen it since. She was too frightened to look to see whether it had been burnt. Did not know who gave the child the candle. Could not say how the accident happened. Her husband did not see the candle.

The Coroner: "It is a pity when you saw the candle that you did not look to see whether it had been alight.

Witness's mother, who had been present, said she thought her daughter was too much worried. The Coroner: It would have been more satisfactory to me and the jury. Witness added that there was no bonfire near and that the child did not catch fire in the house. Deceased had no matches.

Mr. A. BANKS, M.R.C.S., said he had attended the child previously. When sent for on Friday he was just going out. Deceased's father came for him later than 6 o'clock. He was not able to go that night, but told the father if it was seriously burnt to send it to the hospital. He could not go, to see it, as he was engaged. The father told him that the district nurse was attending to the child. He went on the Sunday morning. The child was in bed. He found it burnt on both hands and forearms and face. The burns were of a serious character, especially those on the face. The nurse had attended to the child quite properly. He looked upon it as a bad case then. He went each day afterwards to see it, with no exception. He saw it last on Thursday morning when it was worse. It had a high fever, and he thought it could not recover. It was going into convulsions. The Foreman: Do you think if you had gone at once to the child when sent for there would have been any chance of saving its life? ---I don't think so at all. The nurse was fully trained. Told the father what the nurse was to do. He thought the child was gone to hospital, but he found it was not there on Saturday.

The Coroner said the case was different from any he had ever had before. Although he was perfectly satisfied that the child died from burns, it was difficult to advise them what to say as to how they took place. He again said it was unfortunate that when the mother saw the little boy with the toy candle she did not take it to see whether it had been lighted. In his opinion there could be no doubt that it must have been lighted, but there was no actual evidence of it. As far as he understood there was no suspicious circumstances; at the same time it was unsatisfactory that there was no evidence to lead them to say that it was an accident, although he had no doubt that it was. He never knew a case similar to that.

A Juror said the deceased might have fallen into the fire.

The jury found that the child died from burns, but that there was not sufficient evidence to show how they were caused.

IW OBSERVER. Saturday 15th April. 1899

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A LITTLE CHILD

An inquest was held at the Oakfield Inn, on Saturday afternoon, by the Coroner (Mr. E.F. BLAKE) upon the body of a little boy, aged two years named **Robert George MILLS**, the son of Robert MILLS, a pensioner, of Oakfield. Mr WAITE was the foreman of the jury.

Ernest WOODFORD who lives at 32, High Street, Oakfield, next door to the parents of the deceased, deposed that on the evening of Good Friday, he saw the deceased child at the top of the garden in flames. He ran to him, put out the flames, and called the father, who at once came, and he handed the child to him. He did not notice any bonfire near, nor any fire at all in the neighbourhood and could not tell at all how the child caught fire.

The Coroner said that he was told there were some other children there, and that they had made a little fire. Witness said he did not notice it.

Alice MILLS , the mother of the child, deposed that she saw the little boy about ten minutes before the accident. He had been playing about in the room where she was, with her other little boy, who was about five years old, and then they went out into the garden. She had not the slightest idea as to how the accident happened. She was going across the road to her mother, but before she had time to get across, she was sent for by her husband and went back at once. She found the child in her husband's arms. The flames were extinguished then, but she saw burns on the child's arms and face. She applied linseed oil to the burns. The child's little frock and his pinafore were burnt . She sent for the doctor, but he could not come, and in his absence a nurse from the District Home was sent for. Dr BANKS came on Sunday morning, and the child did not seem much worse. The nurse came twice. Witness carried out the instructions given her, but the child died the previous day at half past seven.

The Coroner:- Can't you give us any information as to how this child caught fire ?

The constable said the mother had told him that the little boy had a toy candle.

Witness said that it was not the deceased, but her other little boy who came in with a toy candle, but that was an hour after the accident had occurred.

The Coroner:- What do you mean by a toy candle ? A little candle, such as they put on Christmas trees. Had it been ignited? --I don't know. I did not look at it. I told him to take it away. I did not want to see it. I was too flurried and upset. I had no idea where he could have got it from, and I don't know how the child could have got it alight.

The Coroner:- It is a great pity you did not look at it, for then you could have told us whether it had been lit or not.

Witness.- I was too much worried and frightened. There was no little bonfire in the neighbourhood.

The Coroner.- The probability seems to be that this other little boy of yours must have caught the child on fire.- I went to see if he had any matches, but I could not find any. The Coroner.- No doubt a boy of five years of age would be cute enough to get the matches and to set them on fire but I doubt whether the deceased could have done so. In reply to other questions, Mrs MILLS said that her husband had gone away and taken the other little boy with him, so he could not be called as a witness.

Dr. BANKS then deposed that on the 31st ult, he was just going out, when the father of the deceased came for him, shortly after 6 o'clock, and said that his child had been burnt. He told MILLS that if the child had been seriously burnt, he was to send it to the Hospital. He also told him, that he was engaged, and could not come then. MILLS told him that the District Nurse was there. He was not able to go to the deceased on Saturday, but on Sunday , as he did not see, the deceased at the Hospital, where he expected to find him, he went to the house. On examining the child he found it had been seriously burnt on the hands, arms and face. He could see that the district nurse had properly attended to the case, which he looked upon as a very bad one. He went each day afterwards without

exception. When he saw the child on Thursday it was very much worse and in a very high fever. He had no doubt that the death resulted from the burns.

Mr WAITE.- Do you think if you had come at once there would have been any chance of saving its life ?- No , I don't think so at all. When I went the child was properly attended by a trained nurse. They did not send for me again, and when I did not find it at the Hospital, I went to the house to see how it was.

The Coroner said it was rather an unfortunate circumstance that the mother had not examined the candle to see if it had been ignited. He had no doubt in his own mind that the elder child tried to light the candle, and caught the deceased's pinafore on fire, but there was no actual evidence to prove it. They had no evidence to show that it was an accident, but he had no doubt in his mind that it was. The jury found that the child died from the burns, but there was not sufficient evidence to show how they were caused.

Researched and typed by
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