

**FATALITY AMBULANCE SAID TO HAVE BEEN "CONDEMNED"**  
**Inquest Witness And Examination For Ryde Corporation**

How an ambulance, which Ryde Corporation had previously refused to purchase because of its condition, got out of control killing one man and injuring five other people, was described at an inquest at Ryde yesterday.

The victim was Mr. **Charles GLASGOW**, (80), independent, of St. Clair, The Strand, Ryde.

The inquest, which was held at the High Street Methodist Schoolroom, was a sequel to a crash at St. Thomas' Square, Ryde, on September 29th, when an ambulance mounted the pavement striking six people and hitting three shop windows.

Louis Vivian ALLEN, St. Clair, The Strand, Ryde, nephew, gave evidence of identification.

Mrs. Florence Mary BRADING, widow of Newport, said she had been cautioned by the police before making a statement. Her solicitor said she would elect to give evidence. She was the driver of the ambulance.

She said she had been acting as a driver for the Newport A.R.P. Ambulance Service since the war broke out.

The ambulance she had driven on the day of the accident was the one on which she was taught to drive but she had driven other vehicles since.

She had been instructed to go to Ryde Esplanade to collect a couple, a perambulator and two children to go to Brighthstone in connection with the evacuation scheme. She was to receive further instructions from Mrs. NEEDHAM, she stated.

The Coroner: Was the ambulance examined by an official before you left?- I was told it had been seen to. It had been giving trouble the day before.

The Coroner: Who told you? - Ambulance workers and first aid men.

Mrs. BRADING said she had four passengers, including one woman, in the car.

Was it necessary to have four of you? - No, but I was asked and was told I could take two of the fellows with me.

For a joy ride? - Yes.

She travelled down High Street, Ryde, at about 6 m.p.h. and found the brakes were not holding.

**Why Ambulance Was Used**

"I asked Miss LOCKE, who was sitting at my side, to pull on the handbrake because I had narrowly avoided colliding with a car which was coming up the street," she said.

"The next thing I remembered was mounting the pavement and crashing into the shops."

The Coroner: Is there no regulation about using cars for this purpose? Surely the primary purpose of an ambulance is not to carry people and goods.

Mrs. BRADING said she received her instructions in writing to take the brown ambulance.

The Coroner: What was the reason for the accident? - I could not get the brakes to hold. These ambulances are not the easiest things to handle.

The Coroner: What I want to know is why the ambulance was used at all and why all these people were there. It does not seem consistent with economy that four people should go in an ambulance to fetch these things.

Mr. G. S. GREEN (for Mrs. BRADING) said with respect he did not consider this was a matter for the Coroner to deal with.

"It only makes her position more unhappy and more unbearable to ask questions which have no bearing on the case."

**Complaints From Other Drivers**

The Coroner said that he felt the attention of the Government should be drawn to the manner in which "joy riding" was taking place at public expense.

Mr. GREEN said that since the date of the accident a reduction of personnel had taken place in the A.R.P.

In reply to Mr. GREEN, Mrs. BRADING said she had been driving for four years and had had a car of her own. She had been training with the A.R.P. since September 1938, and became a full-time driver since the war began.

She had heard complaints about the ambulance from other drivers. it was always giving trouble. The vehicle's unladen weight was 1 ton 12 cwt.

Mr. GREEN: Have you heard any complaints about its brakes? - The complaints were general and the steering was hard.

She said the ambulance was 12 years old and had previously belonged to the Isolation Hospital.

She and the other drivers took whatever vehicles they were told to take.

"We knew there was not much money and we used to make the best of it."

The Coroner: Do you know whether the ambulance was rejected by the Ryde Corporation some time ago? - I don't know.

Mrs. BRADING said that during a blackout test she had been complimented upon her driving to Freshwater in a respirator.

The reason she asked Miss LOCK to hold the brake was that she wanted both hands to manage the steering wheel. She was sure that her foot had not slipped from the foot-brake to the accelerator.

"I did what I could," she said, describing the way the vehicle mounted the pavement. "I was still hanging on trying to stop.

The vehicle was in bottom gear.

In answer to Mr. HARMAN, Mrs. BRADING said that she understood that as a result of a complaint from a woman driver, the ambulance had been to Messrs. FOWLER's Garage the previous day.

The Coroner asked if any official was responsible to examine the vehicle daily.

The Coroner said it was apparent that the ambulance was defective and he considered some evidence should be offered.

"If this ambulance had a bad reputation it should have been examined daily" he said.

A Juror: Do I understand from this witness that the County Council have no money to provide suitable ambulances?

The question was not answered.

The Coroner said that he considered that on the present evidence it was impossible to apportion blame.

Mr. R. FLUX, appearing for people who were injured, asked that he should be allowed to put questions to the witness, but Mr. GREEN objected that it was not permissible.

"If the inquest is to be made a pre-battle ground for possible claims for injuries, I shall not be party to it," he said.

Mr. FLUX said his question was why, if the driver found the brakes were not holding, she did not stop?

Mrs. BRADING: That is what I wanted to do.

Mr. FLUX: Why did she mount the pavement if she still had control.

Mr. GREEN: I must protest.

He then advised his client to refuse to answer further question from Mr. FLUX.

### **Difficulty On Corner**

Mr. C. MERRILL (who represented Mr. GLASGOW's relatives and some of the injured) asked if Mrs. BRADING had any difficulty on Binstead Hill.

Mrs. BRADING said she felt uneasy about the car. At no time was the car so bad as to cause her to consider stopping.

Mr. MERRILL asked if she had any difficulty in negotiating the corner from John Street into High Street.

Mrs. BRADING: Yes, I did rather.

Did you feel you ought to stop then?

I could not after that.

From the moment you turned John Street corner you were in difficulty?-

Yes, right down until the crash.

Mrs. BRADING said that she was travelling at about 5 miles an hour at John Street, but the speed had increased to about 15 miles per hour. She mounted the pavement because she had no power to steer the vehicle which was then out of control.

At the time of the crash, she had one hand on the brake as well as Miss LOCK. The ambulance had been on the pavement for some distance before it hit Messrs. Timothy WHITE's window. She was still holding the brake when the ambulance finally came to rest in Messrs. FLINN's shop.

The foreman intimated that the jury wished to have evidence from an A.R.P. official about the vehicle.

The Coroner said they were now attempting to obtain the attendance of an official.

Ralph Charles CRAGG, motor engineer, said his firm, Messrs. Wight Motors, had been instructed to remove the ambulance. On the orders of Sgt. TURNBULL the wheels were jacked up and the brakes tested. A road test could not be given because the foot axle was damaged.

When the foot brake was put on it was impossible to turn the rear wheels by hand. The hand brake was tested by a crane.

### **"I Condemned It"**

Mr. CRAGG said he had examined the ambulance on behalf of the Ryde Council about four months previously.

"I condemned it," he said.

The ambulance at that time belonged to the Isolation Hospital, he said. He was informed afterwards that on his recommendation the Ryde Council had decided not to buy the ambulance.

He did not know the history of the ambulance after that date.

The Coroner: Could it have been made serviceable? - I informed the Council that £35 to £40 would have to be spent on the ambulance to make it serviceable but I did not recommend that because of its age.

Mr. GREEN: What do you think the effect of the brakes would be under road conditions? - We could not reproduce the conditions but the strain would be greater than a man could exert.

The footbrake could be pushed to 3/4 in. from the footboards before the brake acted, he said.

Mr. MERRILL: Knowing what you do about this ambulance and its steering, do you think that it was a heavy job for a woman? - Yes, unless she was very used to it.

Mr. CRAGG said that when he examined the vehicle for the Corporation the brakes were faulty.

Miss Dorothy LOCK, a V.A.D. nurse, attached to the Newport A.R.P., said she received instructions from the Transport Office at the County Hall to go to Ryde. She sat beside the driver.

"Going down High Street, Ryde, Mrs. BRADING said 'catch hold of the handbrake'," she said. "I managed to take it from her.

"Then the ambulance swung across the road, mounted the pavement, collided with a woman and hit a shop window. There was a series of crashes.

"After the accident, Mrs. BRADING said to me 'The brakes would not hold'."

She thought Mrs. BRADING lost control just after they entered High street.

Miss LOCK said she had been told to go to help with the children.

The Coroner stated that an A.R.P. officer responsible for the vehicle had now arrived in court.

Scott Henry CRAWLEY-WAY, 74 The Mall, motor-salesman-mechanic, said he was not in the employ of the County Council, but acted as a voluntary maintenance officer for the A.R.P. at Newport.

He maintained the vehicles during his spare time and had examined the ambulance on Tuesday, September 26th, when he took it out over Alvington-hill on a test run. The ambulance was then in good condition.

He had received no complaints about the ambulance, though drivers have reported trouble with others.

The ambulance had been used as an instruction vehicle before the war broke out.

Mr. GREEN: Do you do repairs to the vehicles yourself? -They would be taken to a garage.

### **Taken For Test Drive**

Your maintenance work is really a question of saying that so and so ought to be done? - Yes.

He was not aware that the vehicle had been tested by the Ryde Corporation and comments about the brakes.

Would you be surprised? - Yes.

Mr. CRAWLEY-WAY, replying to a question, said he did not make a routine test of the vehicles, but took each out for a test run.

"There are some people who would rather drive this than others," he said.

Mr. GREEN: Would you call this the veteran among them? - No, they are all about the same age.

Mr. GREEN: would it be possible that a verbal complaint about the vehicle never reached you? - I should not think so.

Mr. HARMAN, for the A.R.P., authorities, pointed out that Alvington-hill was steeper than High-street.

Mr. MERRILL: Are you capable of making a detailed examination of the ambulance simply from taking it out on the road? - Yes.

Mr. MERRILL: Mrs. BRADING has sworn that there were complaints about this vehicle? - I have heard none.

Complaints, he said, would be reported to him and not to Captain DRUDGE.

The foreman: has the ambulance ever been treated for the brakes? - Not since the outbreak of the war, but they had attended to it during the tuition period.

The foreman said he still felt that expert information was lacking and asked if an official from Messrs. FOWLER's garage could be obtained.

Mr. CRAWLEY-WAY said the only person available would be the garage foreman.

### **Death From Shock**

Mr. MERRILL: Have you had a good look underneath at the mechanical side since it came under your control? - No; I have had no occasion to do so.

Dr. Mary BAKER, house surgeon at the County Hospital, said that on admission GLASGOW was conscious and not suffering from much pain.

His right leg was extensively crushed with a compound fracture of the tibia and fibia. he had a cut on his head.

During the afternoon his leg was amputated below the thigh. A blood transfusion was given after the operation and his condition was satisfactory for several days.

He died at 9.30 p.m. on October 7th, from shock.

William John Stanley ANGROVE, a Newport ambulance worker, said he was in the rear of the ambulance and described how he had seen through a small window as the vehicle crossed the road and mounted the pavement.

He saw the ambulance strike an elderly man and pin a woman to the ground. He jumped out and helped to free the woman, who had a compound fracture of the right leg.

ANGROVE said that the reason the two men went was that their instructions were that two stretcher bearers and a V.A.D. nurse must accompany the ambulance.

The Coroner: It seems to take a good many hands to do a small amount of work.

Mr. HARMAN: There might have been an air raid while they were out.

ANGROVE said that Mrs. BRADING drove perfectly until she reached High-street. He thought some defect developed in the vehicle, possibly the steering.

Henry Edward John COLLEYPRIEST, electrician, of Wayside, Mayfield-road, Ryde, described how walking down High-street, he shouted to warn people when he saw the ambulance out of control.

Mr. HARMAN asked if, in view of suggestions that the County Council had sent out the ambulance in a defective condition, the Coroner would call the driver who drove the ambulance the previous day.

Joan FIDGEON, Brookside, Blackwater-road, An A.R.P. ambulance driver, said the previous day she drove the ambulance to Messrs. FOWLER's to have the tyres and oil attended to.

She had no difficulty except in starting and had used the hand-brake and foot brake, both of which had functioned properly. She did not know of any complaint by any other drivers.

Sergeant J. TURNBULL said that on reaching the scene he found several doctors attending to the injured. he found a mark made by the offside wheel which showed the ambulance had run zig-zag on the pavement for 82 feet. He thought the brake must have been on to make the mark.

Summing up, the Coroner said that they had contradictory evidence on the character of the ambulance.

He accepted that Mrs. BRADING lost control.

A further question was put by the jury to Mrs. BRADING. She was asked if she noticed anything wrong with the steering. She said it was difficult but did not think anything was wrong.

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death and stated that they "consider that the lady lost control of the car."

They added a rider that "The jury are of the opinion that enough care was not taken by the A.R.P. authorities in bringing the ambulance into service after having been condemned by an expert on behalf of a local authority."

Mr. HARMAN said there was no evidence against the County Council.

The foreman said: We think it was such a tremendous accident that something should be done.

The funeral will take place on Friday at 2.30, at St. John's Church.

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## ACCIDENT VICTIMS

Mrs. MEW, who was injured in the fatal ambulance accident at St. Thomas' Square, Ryde, and Mrs. ARNOLD, of Brading, who received a fractured skull when knocked down by a motor-car on the Brading-road, are both stated to be "fairly comfortable" at the County Hospital.

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ISLE OF WIGHT TIMES Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October 1939

### MR. CHARLES GLASGOW

The funeral of Mr. Charles GLASGOW, the victim of the St. Thomas' Square ambulance accident, who lived at St. Clair, The Strand, took place on Friday. Mr. GLASGOW, who spent his younger days at Southsea and was trained for the Ministry, chose accountancy for his career. He entered the service of the P and O Steamship Co., Ltd., and served at the Bombay Office.

Retiring about eighteen years ago, Mr. GLASGOW married on coming to Ryde His wife died in 1931.

The funeral service took place at St. John's Church, in which Mr. GLASGOW took great interest. The Rev. J. A. C. FOSTER officiated.

The mourners were Mr. L. V. FORD-ELLEN (nephew), Miss Irene FORD-ELLEN (niece). Also present were Major J. C. BASSETT, Miss Laura DIMMICK, Mrs. E. G. WELLS, Mrs. BAILEY, Miss E. MOORE, Miss LOCK, Mrs. CHAPMAN, Miss HOUGH, Miss SCOTT, Mr. A. J. BURGE, Miss LAVARY, Mrs. BARTON, Mr. F. DALE, Miss MUNRO-ROBERTS, and Mr. and Mrs. P. BULL.

Among the flowers laid at the graveside in Ryde Cemetery were wreaths from Mrs. F. M. BRADING (driver of the ambulance), and Miss LOCK, who was a passenger.

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