

Sad Discovery.
FOUND DROWNED IN THE TUNNEL
PUMP HOUSE

Much excitement was caused about mid-day on Saturday by the discovery of the body of **James BEARD**, fitter in the employ of the I.W. Joint Railway Co., in about 5 ft of water in the well of the Pump-house by the tunnel near the Esplanade station. The deceased who was 66 years of age and greatly respected, had been for many years employed in looking after the engine and other appliances in the Pump house which he visited every morning and on Saturday he appeared to have been engaged only for a short time in cleaning the grease cups when he fell forward into the well where he was found floating, his watch stopping at 8.15 a.m. A post mortem examination was made and the witnesses at the inquiry were unable to say whether he became ill and collapsed or whether it was an accident. In the former case it was believed he would have fallen vertically whereas the body was at a considerable angle on the other side of the barrier. The inquest was conducted by the District Coroner (F. A. JOYCE Esq), at the Primitive Methodist schoolroom on Tuesday afternoon when Mr. C. H. SNOW, from the Solicitors Department Waterloo Station, represented the Joint Railway Co., and Mr. R. L. FLUX watched the case on behalf of the family and N.U.R. the Chief Constable (Mr. C. GREENSTREET) represented the police, and Mr. FRENCH, station master, also attended. Deceased resided at "Harrogate," Daniel Street.

George Henry BEARD, 2 Rose Bank, Albert Street, stated he was a blacksmith employed by the Railway Co., and identified the body as that of his father who had been 41 years in the employ of the company. It had been his habit to go to the engine room of the Pump house to pump out the water daily and he had not had any previous accident. His father was not subject to fits and usually enjoyed good health and had never complained of the work being dangerous. Witness occasionally assisted him to repair the engines. He last saw him alive at 25 minutes to 8 on Saturday morning when he came to the shop for his key, and it was his usual practise to go to the engine house and see that everything was right and then to the Pierhead to see the lamps. Deceased had complained that one of the shafts was "chattering" a bit and wanted oiling

By Mr. FLUX : Deceased was not engaged in any special work on Saturday.

Charles FOUNTAINE, labourer, employed by the Joint Railway Co. and living at Ivy Cottage, Weeks Road, said he went to the Pump house on Saturday to look for deceased and he did not book off at the usual time at noon. He got no reply and then went and saw him floating in the water in an upright position in the north-west corner of the stump hole, the depth of the water being about 5ft. 5in. The body was about 2ft. from the iron ladder which was in the corner.

Was his head under the water? – No I saw the back of his head and his collar, his face being under water.

Witness said he procured the assistance of several of his mates and started the engine to pump out the water, but found it unnecessary as he could reach the remains with the aid of a broom and they were brought out. He had not seen him before that morning.

By Mr. SNOW : Deceased had his blue cloth cap on his head when discovered and looked in a helpless condition his hands being open away from his body and had all his clothing on with the exception of his jacket which was hanging up in the usual place.

From the nearest stage how far would he have fallen? – About 6 feet. He looked at his watch which had stopped at 8.15 a.m.

If he was not unconscious when he fell there were several things he could have seized hold of? – Yes, there were three ladders, girders, and shafts.

Mr. FLUX : But not if he was standing on the ladder attending to the grease cups.

In reply to further questions witness said the sleeves of deceased's cardigan were turned back as if he had been working.

Oliver George SMITH, 60 Well Street, works foreman in the employ of the Joint Railway Co., stated he saw deceased about 7.40 on Saturday morning when he was going to the pump house. Deceased joined the company's service in June 1880 and had always been engaged on this particular work. He had made no complaint or suggestion as to further precautions being desirable. Witness had never known him to be seized with any sudden illness during the 16 ½ years he had known him. No previous accident had happened to witness's knowledge.

You cannot suggest any further security? – No I cannot sir.

Mr. SNOW in answer to the Coroner, said the pump house was a private structure used where tunnels got flooded occasionally and would be periodically inspected by the Company's engineers but there were no regulations on the subject.

Witness replying to Mr. SNOW, said that a day or two before the accident deceased complained of feeling unwell but he was able to do his work. He was one of the most regular men he ever knew and a splendid time keeper.

Can you suggest any work at all that would cause him to descend a ladder other than attending to these grease cups? – No I cannot. The cups are about 18 inches from the edge of the ladder and would not require any straining to reach.

Assuming that he died at 8.15 that morning what would be about the depth of the water? – I should say there would be about 3ft. 6in. He was about 5ft. 6in. in height.

The Coroner elicited that the deceased could swim.

Dr. PRIDMORE stated that he had made a post mortem examination of the body and found all the organs healthy and attribute death to drowning the condition of the lungs indicating this. He could find no other cause. There was a slight scratch under the right eye but no injury to the bones or any other part of the body. He did not think the slight injury could produce unconsciousness.

By Mr. FLUX : the heart was sound and he did not think he fainted.

Mr. FLUX: If he had collapsed he would have fallen vertically whereas he fell at a considerable angle on the other side of the barrier.

The Coroner said his own theory was that the man was seized with illness and fell into the well but there was so much doubt and conflict in his mind that he proposed to return a verdict "Found Drowned, such drowning being probably due to illness or accident."

Mr. SNOW on behalf of the Railway Co., expressed sympathy with deceased's relatives.
