

ELDERLY RYDE SISTERS' TRAGIC DEATH
FOUND GASED AT THEIR HOME

Last evening the Acting Coroner (Mr. J.V. BULLIN) held an inquest at Ryde Town Hall on Miss **May HOPKINS**, aged 67, and Miss **Elizabeth HOPKINS**, aged 63, who were found dead in a gas-filled room at their home, Highfield, High Park Road, Elmfield, on Wednesday evening.

The sisters were school teachers, but had both retired about 20 years ago for reasons of health and on reduced pensions. One taught at Havenstreet Council School and the other at Nettlestone Council School and the tragic news of their death was received in the neighbourhood and particularly by old scholars with feelings of deep regret. Sincere retirement they had lived a rather secluded life. Neither had enjoyed good health for some years and both had been patients at Whitecroft Hospital for a period. They came from London to live in Ryde with their mother many years ago, but the police have been unable to trace any relatives. On Wednesday Mrs. R. DALLIMORE, who lives next door, and for a long time had given them neighbourly assistance, became alarmed when she failed to obtain a response at the house, and on hearing the sound of escaping gas and being unable to gain admittance, immediately informed the police. Detective-Constable GOODALL and P.C. WOOD broke a window in order to enter the house and so great was the intensity of escaping gas that they were forced to use towels as masks. They discovered the two sisters lying dead on the scullery floor. Gas was issuing from six jets on the stove and the oven door had been removed. One of the sisters was fully clothed and the other had a coat over night attire, and they were covered with an eiderdown. Determinate efforts had been made to seal up the house, which belonged to the sisters. A note was found containing funeral instructions and also an open cheque in favour of a local undertaker. The bodies were removed to the mortuary at Ryde Cemetery where the funeral will take place on Monday.

THE INQUEST

Mrs. Bessie Louse DALLIMORE said that the Misses HOPKINS had lived next door to her for 17 years. They had complained of poor health and they had been much worse lately, but she had never heard them mention taking their lives. She last saw them on Monday evening when Miss May was in bed and complained of how thin her arms were getting and Miss Emily said she was worried about it. Witness went to the house about lunchtime on Wednesday. She knocked the door but received no reply and thought the sisters were resting. When she came home at 8 p.m. she told her husband she was going to see them as it was strange she had not heard them. On going to the house she smelled gas and saw that there were no lights in the living-room. She immediately got into touch with the police. Witness identified a note produced in Miss May's handwriting.

Dr. L.P. FIRMAN-EDWARDS, J.P.M stated that when he arrived at the house at about 8.30 p.m. both women were dead. Death was due to coal gas poisoning. Both were well nourished but Miss May was rather thin and plate.

Dr. D. O'BRIEN said the sisters had been his patients since July 1949, and ever since he had known them they had been in a state of chronic depression. He last saw Miss May on March 31st and Miss Emily on April 14th.

P.C. D. WOOD described how he found the bodies. The note was addressed to Mrs. DALLIMORE and expressed thanks for all her kindness to them and state that they could not bear the mental and physical strain any longer and were wasting away. The note also referred to a will and funeral arrangements.

The Coroner recorded a verdict that death was due to carbon monoxide poisoning, self administered while the balance of their minds were disturbed. He commended P.C. WOOD for the efficient way in which he carried out his duties under difficult circumstances.

The Late Misses HOPKINS. – The Misses May and Emily HOPKINS, of Hillside, High Park Road, who were found dead last week in a gas-filled room at their home were buried in the same grave at Ryde Cemetery on Monday morning. The mourners were Mrs. R. DALLIMORE and Miss DALLIMORE

and there were about 20 other friends present. The service was conducted by the Rev. A.J. PEARMAN (vicar of St. John's).

Messrs J. WHEELER and Sons made the arrangements.

NB: We note the discrepancy in the first name in the report above of "Elizabeth" instead of Emily

Researched & typed by
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