

MERSLEY DOWN RIDING FATALITY

Two men were seriously injured and one has since died as a result of accidents of a similar nature which occurred on Mersley Down shortly after mid-day on Tuesday. The man fatally injured was Frederick COPELAND, aged 46, of Duxmore Cottage, Arreton. He had lately been employed as a travelling cinema operator by E.N.S.A., and was a single man. The other injured man is a soldier serving in the Royal Artillery.

It appears that COPELAND, who was in the habit of riding over the downs, was out on a mare owned by Mr. F. BRACE, of Duxmore Farm. He had descended Mersley Down and was just past the junction of the main road with that leading to Knighton when the accident occurred. Four other riders, including Miss Joan FARDELL, of Morton Manor, Brading, were descending the hill from Ashy Down, when they noticed COPELAND endeavouring to mount the bank on the opposite side of the road. In doing so he was seen to fall, and the mare bolted in the opposite direction. Miss FARDELL and her friends went to the injured man's assistance, and found him in a semi-conscious condition, with head injuries. A military doctor took him to near Duxmore in his car, and later he was removed to the County Hospital. Meanwhile the mare had made off up the other side of the down, and turned into Rowlands-lane, where she was stopped by the soldier, who apparently mounted with the intention of bringing her back. He was seen in the distance clinging desperately to her as she took fright again and bolted. The soldier, seeing his position, threw himself from the frantic animal, hoping to land on the grass bank. However, he came to grief on the road and sustained serious injuries, and was rendered unconscious. The doctor attended him, and he was afterwards taken by ambulance to Parkhurst Military Hospital. COPELAND died early on Wednesday morning.

Yesterday (Friday) the Deputy- Coroner (R. E. A. WEBSTER, Esq.) conducted an inquiry into the sad circumstances at Ryde. Mr. C. D. MUCKLOW was foreman of the jury and Inspector TURNBULL represented the police.

Arthur Ernest COPELAND, of Lancing, Sussex, said his brother a mobile cinema operator for E.N.S.A., had been riding for about seven years.

Frederick George BRACE, farmer, of Duxmore Farm, near Newport, said deceased had lodged with his sister-in-law since May 24th. He struck witness as being a good rider. On April 27th witness sold COPELAND a 4-year-old mare, perfectly mannered and having no vice. He had had the mare for 7 months and had ridden her. After riding the mare deceased said he was quite satisfied with her. On Tuesday COPELAND told him he was going riding, and at 5 p.m. he saw him at his sister-in-law's house, lying in bed with his clothes on in a semi-conscious state. Deceased told him he had met with a slight accident. Asked what had happened, he tried to tell him but could not. When asked if it was the fault of the horse he replied "No, it was entirely my fault." A little later he heard deceased get out of bed and thought it was time to send for a doctor. Later in the evening witness went to Brading and rode the horse home. He had no trouble with her in passing traffic, but met no horses. The mare had never shied with him.

By the foreman: The mare was broken to saddle before he had her.

Miss Joan Alice FARDELL, an ambulance driver, of Morton Manor, Brading, deposed that at 12.15 p.m. on Tuesday she was riding with Mrs. GLOYNE from Brading towards Mersley Down. As they turned from Ashy Cross to the left to go down Knighton-hill they saw a horseman approaching some distance away, the horse was walking quietly. The next thing she saw was the horse being turned towards a small bank. After it had placed its forelegs on the grass it swung round quickly into the road and the rider fell off. In her opinion it was a quiet refusal by the horse which

caused the rider to fall backwards. When released of its rider the horse went towards Mersley Down at a canter. On going to the scene of the accident she found deceased pushing himself backwards towards the bank. An army vehicle came along and an officer, who said he was a doctor, took charge. She saw the doctor get deceased up on to his feet and noticed that he had a cut on the top of the head which was not bleeding very much.

The Coroner said that a soldier who apparently found the horse a quarter of a mile away was riding it back when the horse apparently unseated this rider, who was now in hospital with a fractured skull. It was a most extraordinary set of circumstances, and he wondered if Miss FARDELL could tell them whether, when she saw the second accident, the horse was excitable, and whether it had seen the other horses again.

Miss FARDELL replied that it could not have seen their horses on the second occasion. It was galloping very fast towards a fence and struck her as being scared. She thought the rider threw himself off.

The Coroner said horses were curious creatures, and he wondered whether it might have been previously stabled with one of the other horses, between which there was some antipathy, but they could now rule that out.

Replying to the jury, Miss FARDELL said it did not look to her as if deceased tried to save himself; it looked as if he lost his balance and let everything go.

Mrs. Gladys GLOYNE, riding school owner, of 76 The Broadway, Sandown, corroborated, adding that she saw no vicious attempt made by the horse to unseat its rider. On examining the saddlery, she found everything in the correct position.

By the Foreman: he should call the actions of the rider immediately before and at the time of the accident those of an experienced rider.

Capt. Lionel HUSDAN, R.A.M.C., said he was travelling in an Army vehicle when he saw a riderless horse cantering along smoothly, and 200 yards further away he saw a man lying on his back in the road. He examined him and found a small abrasion on the top of his head. He was dazed, but was able to tell witness his name and where he lived. Witness took him along in the vehicle until they reached broken country about 200 yards from the farm. Deceased got out of the vehicle, and, assisted by the witness, walked to some few yards from the farm, where he protested that the witness had done enough for him, and that he was all right. While deceased was being driven towards the farm his conversation was quite rational. He said it was not the horse's fault, but his own; he did something wrong, and struck something sharp into the horse. He now thought that deceased must have developed delayed cerebral compression.

Mrs. Yvonne MEREDITH, of The Cottage, Duxmore Farm, said that on Tuesday when deceased told her he was going riding she left him a meal. When she returned at 4.45 she found that the meal had not been eaten, but there was vomit on the plate. She then found that deceased had been in the house alone. She found him in bed. Asked what had happened, he said he had had a slight accident and fallen off his horse. She made him a cup of tea, and he lay back and closed his eyes. Her brother-in-law then sent for a doctor.

Dr. W. A. PORTER, house surgeon at the County Hospital, said deceased was admitted in an unconscious condition on Tuesday evening, when an X-ray examination showed a fracture of the left side of the skull, from which he died early next morning. He agreed with Captain HUSDAN as to the development of delayed cerebral compression.

P.C. WARD said he found hoof marks on the road and on the bank, indicating that the horse had slewed round.

In reply to the Foreman, Mr. BRACE said deceased was not riding with spurs.

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death, and that there was insufficient evidence to show why the rider was thrown.

The Coroner said possibly when deceased put his horse to the grass he took his eyes off it and glance in the direction of the lady riders, and when the horse slewed round he became unseated.

The jury and Coroner expressed deep sympathy with the relatives, which was acknowledged by deceased's brother.

Researched & typed by
Ann Barrett
Kate MacDonell