

**RYDE WIDOW DID NOT HEED WARNING  
INQUEST ON VICTIM OF BURNING TRAGEDY**

The Coroner (Mr. J.V. BULLIN) recorded a verdict of accidental death from burns at an inquest at Ryde Town Hall on Friday week on Mrs. Gertrude Caroline Ann FROUD, an 87-year-old who died on January 12<sup>th</sup> at her home, 8 Winton Street, Ryde, where she lived alone.

Annie STEVENS, a nurse of 80 Monkton street, Ryde who gave evidence of identification, said Mrs. FROUD was active for her age and reasonably capable of looking after herself. Witness often visited Mrs. FROUD and also supplied her with her mid-day meals. It was Mrs. FROUD's invariable habit to sit in her front room in an armchair near an electric fire. No persuasion would cause her to move the fire or have it moved. She was very determined about not having it moved although witness had pointed out to her the risk of catching fire. When witness went to bed at 10.30 p.m. on January 12<sup>th</sup>, she could still hear the wireless in Mrs. FROUD's house. She went down and opened the back door and at the same time the police rang her front door bell and asked her to go to the house. A Police officer then broke in through a back window of Mrs. FROUD's house.

Dr. P.D. SWINSTEAD (pathologist) said he carried out a post mortem examination on January 13<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. FROUD died as the result of very severe burns, consistent with her clothing having caught alight. Examination showed nothing to indicate that she had had a seizure or heart attack.

Gwendoline Edith May ALLEN, domestic servant employed by Mrs. STEVENS, said she took in Mrs. FROUD's mid-day meal on January 12<sup>th</sup>. The electric fire in the front room was on and Mrs. FROUD was sitting in her arm-chair in front of it. She was very close to the fire, as she usually was.

**NEIGHBOUR CALLED POLICE**

John Dougal BETT, of 7 Winton Street, said Mrs. FROUD went to bed between 7 and 7.30 every evening. When he went up to his children's room soon after 7 p.m. on January 12<sup>th</sup> to see if they were asleep he smelled smoke and first thought it was from a bonfire. He checked his house, and found nothing amiss. At about 8 p.m. his wife told him she could hear the wireless next door. He went to Mrs. FROUD's house and looked through the front room window. He saw that the light was off and that the electric fire was burning. He could not see Mrs. FROUD. He rang the bell several times, but could not get an answer. He knew Mrs. FROUD was deaf. At first he thought she had gone to bed and had forgotten to switch the wireless off. Later he still noticed a smell of smoke and eventually lifted a floorboard in his bathroom where it seemed strongest. There was smoke, and he realised it was not coming from his house. Which was one of a semi-detached pair with Mrs. FROUD's. He went round to Mrs. FROUD, and when he again failed to arouse her he went to the police. It was then about 9.45 or 10 o'clock.

P.C. R.D. BOXALL said that after several attempts to rouse Mrs. FROUD he decided to break in. He found her lying motionless on the kitchen floor. Her body was badly burned and there was no sign of life. There was burnt material in the passage between the front room and the kitchen. The armchair in the front room was badly burned and still smouldering. The electric fire was still burning about 2ft. from the chair.

The Coroner said all those associated with Mrs. FROUD were to be thanked for the way they had looked after her. She had been warned by Mrs. STEVENS about the danger she was in, and she did not heed the warning. He had seen the room and was quite satisfied that either her clothing caught fire direct from the electric fire or from something on it. He was quite satisfied that the cause was accidental. He would like to comment on the prompt way in which everybody appeared to have acted. The way P.C. BOXALL had acted was most commendable. He recorded a verdict of accidental death as the result of burns when Mrs. FROUD's clothing was ignited by an electric fire.