

LONELY WIDOW'S DEATH AT RYDE

PERSISTENT REFUSAL TO LEAVE FAMILY HOME.

A pathetic story of a lonely widow who refused to change her mode of living because she had promised her husband she would keep on the family home was told to the Deputy Coroner (Francis A. JOYCE, Esq.) at an inquest in Ryde on Monday. The deceased was Mrs. **Rosalie SHIPPARD**, aged 72, widow of Major Walkinshaw Orlando Courtney SHIPPARD, a former well known resident of the borough, who was found dead at her home, Lucerne House, John-street, Ryde, on the previous Friday. The inquiry was held in the High-street Methodist School, and Inspector H. ROGERS was the police officer present.

Miss Vera Ethel ALLEN a private nurse, of 55 Salisbury-road, Southsea, said deceased was her aunt and lived alone. The rent of the house was about £32 a year, and she had sent deceased 10s a week for a few years. She had begged her aunt many times to go into rooms, but she was determined to stay in the house for sentimental reasons. Her aunt had tremendous will power. No one had ever given way to her in her life; and she had no idea of anyone having any opinion other than her own. When witness suggested that she should move into rooms, her argument was always the same – she had promised her husband before he died that she would always keep the family home and never leave the house. Witness said she did not suppose that her uncle ever visualised what would happen. Since qualified as a surgical nurse she had come to live in Southsea in order to be near her aunt, but she was only able to visit her at irregular intervals. It was only this year that things had become so bad with deceased, mainly because she was so weak.

P. C. MARTIN deposed that on October 29th he visited the house with P.S. TURNBULL. They entered by the front door, which was unlocked, and found the interior in a shocking state of neglect. In the front bed-room they found deceased lying dead on the floor. She had apparently fallen and struck her head while reaching for something. The body was scantily clad and death had apparently taken place some days previously. They found bread, butter, tea, sugar, and potatoes in various rooms, and the remains of a cooked meal. There was no linen on the bed and deceased had been apparently in the habit of sleeping on a chair. In December, 1936, Mrs. SHIPPARD was brought to the Police Station by a night patrol police officer, suffering from a terrible gash in her head, caused by falling in the street. On that occasion she refused help either from the police or from a doctor who was summoned.

Walter J. G. NEW, relieving officer for the Ryde district, stated that during March last he was called to the Police Station in the early hours of the morning, when a doctor and magistrate were summoned with a view to ascertaining whether deceased was on her right mind. To all intents and purposes she was not of unsound mind, and the magistrate could not see his way to certify her. Deceased was not in a destitute state, having a private income of about £70 a year.

Miss Kitty BURSEY, of John-street, said she had recently been asked to go to Lucerne House to see if deceased was all right. On October 22nd, when she entered the house, she had to push her way through a barricade of furniture. She called to deceased, who replied, "I am all right. My niece is with me." Believing that to be so and thinking that deceased was quite normal, witness left the house.

Dr. L. FIRMAN-EDWARDS, police surgeon, said deceased was in an exceedingly emaciated state and had been dead at least three or four days. In a post-mortem examination he found the stomach quite empty. It was apparent that deceased had taken no food for some time. Death was due to heart failure, consequent upon malnutrition, due to her refusing to allow others to care for her and to taking insufficient food.

The Coroner, who recorded a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, said he did not know what adequate law could be made to provide for cases of that type. It was a great pity that Mrs. SHIPPARD had not agreed to go into an institution, where she would have been properly cared for. He expressed sympathy with the relatives. The Coroner also commented on the number of inquests he had conducted on people living alone in the Island. He had had a number of cases recently, but that was by far the worst.
