

## **DISTRESSING CASE OF DROWNING. RESCUE OF TWO BOYS AND DEATH OF THE RESCUER.**

On Wednesday afternoon last a most deplorable fatality happened on the River Isis at Boney's Bridge, about mid way between Osney and Folly Bridge, the unfortunate victim meeting with his untimely end after having with very great gallantry rescued two little boys who had fallen into the river while fishing. It appears that shortly after two o'clock Mr. Edgar George Wilson, son of the Rev. George Wilson, of 14, Abbey-road, Osney, Minister of the Commercial-road Baptist Chapel,<sup>1</sup> and who was 21 years of age, left home for the purpose of proceeding to business, his profession being that of assistant to Mr. Luff, chemist, Corn Market-street,<sup>2</sup> and from subsequent events it appears that he chose the waterside *viâ* Osney to St. Aldate's as his walk. When near the foot-bridge which spans Hincksey Stream, at its junction with the main river near Boney's Bridge, he saw the two boys above-mentioned in the water, and perceiving their imminent danger, he at once plunged in without removing any of his clothing, and after some difficulty succeeded in rescuing them. He then must have been exhausted, or have fainted, for he was seen to sink by two young men who were close by in a boat, and was apparently unable to save himself. A scull was thrown to him from the boat, which the deceased was said to have touched, and as the other scull in the boat had fallen into the water and drifted away, the occupants of the craft were unable to render any assistance. The body was not recovered until about half-an-hour afterwards, and life was then, of course, extinct; it was taken to the public mortuary in Gloucester Green, but upon satisfactory evidence of identification having been given, the Coroner gave permission for its removal home.

### **THE INQUEST.**

An enquiry into the circumstances attending the calamity was held at the residence of the deceased's father on Thursday afternoon, by the City Coroner, Mr. E. L. Hussey, and after having briefly stated the facts of the case he called the attention of the Jury to a piece of string and a small fishing hook, which it was thought at first had contributed to the death of the deceased, as the string was found twisted round his right wrist, and the hook having caught in his trousers his hand was literally fastened to his body. The string was that with which one of the boys had been fishing, and the hook although detached from it was not broken.

Miss Edith Angel Wilson, sister of the deceased, said on the previous day she saw the deceased at about two o'clock, and on going out he said he was going straight back to business. He could swim but very little, if at all. He had once turned faint in the water at the seaside while bathing, and if he hurt himself at any time he would turn faint. He was not looked upon as strong, but was not weak enough to need medical attendance. She heard shortly after four o'clock that he had not been back to business.

Francis Sylvanus Appleyard, student, lodging at 60, Marston-street, said that at about a quarter-past three on the previous afternoon he was in a boat on the river near to Boney's Bridge, and heard cries that a boy had fallen into the water. He had noticed some boys on the foot bridge near to Boney's Bridge, two of whom were fishing, but not the deceased. He saw some one run down from the wood bridge and jump in, where the water was very deep; he was about six or seven yards from him, and at once backed water and threw in one of the sculls to the deceased, who was then visible; the deceased had by this time rescued two boys who had been in the water by placing them on the breakwater, and the deceased seemed to touch the scull. The other scull floated

away from the boat. The deceased drifted towards the bridge; he tried to float to keep himself up, but sank about three yards from the bridge, and he did not see him afterwards. He did not think that his being entangled with a fishing line prevented the deceased swimming or endeavouring to save himself. He did attempt to catch hold of the breakwater after missing the scull, but it appeared that the weight of his clothes pulled him down. The deceased did not utter a word.

Charles Beckett, 35, Bridge-street, Osney, shunter on the G.W.R., said that at about 3.10 on the previous afternoon, as he was coming over the foot-bridge, over Hincksey stream, near to Boney's Bridge, he saw some boys, who told him that a young man was in the water, who had jumped in to save two boys, and was drowned. He saw two boys who had been in the water. He did not see the deceased. The river was about eight or nine feet in depth at the place where the deceased was supposed to be, and he went for the drags which were kept there, and searched for the body, and found it about five yards from where he was supposed to have gone in. He was fully dressed, with the exception of his hat, which was floating. He noticed a piece of string wound three or four times round his right wrist, and the hook was about a foot away caught in his trousers, his hand thereby being fixed nearly close to his side. The other arm was free. The hook produced was the same that was in the deceased's clothing. The stream was not very strong; he did not see a fishing-rod. He saw a scull that was placed against a support of the bridge.

In reply to a juryman, Beckwith, the summoning officer, said that the boys had made conflicting statements; they had said that they fell in, then that they were pushed in by one another, and then one went as far as to say that he was pushed in by the deceased. They contradicted one another, and would say anything. One was about nine years of age, and the other between seven and eight.

The Jury returned a verdict that deceased was accidentally drowned after having saved the lives of two boys who were in danger, and expressed their strong sympathy with the parents.

The Coroner said it was a noble act on the part of the poor fellow. Here was a young man not very strong, who jumped into water deep enough to drown anyone. He was not strong and was able to swim very little and did this. They heard of medals being given by the Royal Society, but in this case the man was not alive to receive it.

A juryman said the jury felt this was a very noble act, and another juryman said deceased must have been in a very exhausted state, or he might have freed himself.

The father of the deceased, who appeared much distressed, asked permission to say that he had three boys, and two of them were excellent swimmers. They were at Felixstowe last year, and the four of them went for a bathe. The deceased had not been in the water above three or four minutes before he turned faint, and when he came ashore he was sick nearly the whole afternoon. On Wednesday afternoon he came there at a quarter-past two. He always came home to see his sisters, of whom he was passionately fond. One of them was going in for a musical examination in two days' time, and he was helping her a great deal. He came there every day, and then he usually walked round by the river on his way back. He must have seen those boys in the water, and being fond of children, determined to rescue them.

The Coroner: I am very sorry.

Mr. Wilson: May I ask if any efforts were made to revive him.

Beckett said that Basson, the lock-keeper, was present, and when some gentlemen who came up in a boat suggested that a doctor should be sent for, Basson said he had got some hundreds out of the water, and he knew it was useless, as it was half-an hour from the time he heard of the accident till he (Beckett) got the body out of the water.

The enquiry then terminated.

*Jackson's Oxford Journal, 22 June 1889*

<sup>1</sup> Commercial Road was in St Ebbe's.

<sup>2</sup> William Luff's chemist's shop was at 24 Cornmarket, on the site of the present Burger King.