

The Kentish Independent 29th January 1904

CRUSHED TO DEATH

SHOCKING FATALITY IN THE ARSENAL

The terrible consequences which may result from the simplest mishap was again exemplified on Tuesday afternoon, when, at about 3.15, as James Sullivan, a leading hand in the Arsenal, was engaged with others in placing into position a crank shaft in No. 26 engine room, attached to the Saw Mills, the shaft which weighed about 18 tons, slipped and squeezed Sullivan between the eccentric sheath and a block of wood, crushing his side. About half an hour elapsed before he could be extricated from the machinery. He was examined by Major Jamieson, R.A.M.D. who pronounced life extinct. The body was removed to the mortuary, to await the inquest, which will be held today (Friday), at 2 p.m. In the Co-operative institute. The deceased, who was highly respected, was 45 years of age and had been employed by the Arsenal for 21 years. He leaves a widow and eight children for whom great sympathy is felt.

The Kentish Independent 5th February 1904

FATAL ACCIDENT AT THE ARSENAL

A GANGER CRUSHED TO DEATH

THE NEED FOR TOP TACKLE

JURY'S EMPHATIC RIDER

Considerable interest was taken on the body of Jas Sullivan, of 57 Nightingale Place, a ganger in the Royal Carriage Department of the Arsenal, who met with his death through the fall of a piece of machinery weighing 17 tons, whilst at work on Tuesday last week. Mr. H. R. Oswald, the district coroner, conducted the inquiry and the general public was well represented. Captain Owen, Assistant Superintendent R.C.D., represented the Arsenal authorities, and Mr. G. O. Crampton, one of H.M. Inspectors of factories, watched the case on behalf of the Home Office.

Minnie Sullivan, the wife of the deceased said the latter was a leading hand in the Arsenal, and on the Tuesday morning left home about 7.20 to go to his work. He was a sober man, and was quite well. The next she heard of him was that he was dead. His life was not insured. He had been at the work about 21 years.

Albert Palmer, foreman labourer, R.C.D., living at 28 Arthur Street, Plumpstead, said he had worked with the deceased for 21 years, and had been a ganger for 15 years. His work was manipulating heavy machinery. He saw the deceased at two o'clock on Tuesday when he said he was going to load up some iron plates on the railway trucks and he did not know that the deceased was in the engine room until he heard that he was dead. Witness heard that the deceased went to the engine room by the order of the foreman of the engineer branch. The witness went to the engine room and last seeing the deceased alive he said "Good God, what does this mean?" The deceased was pinned in by the eccentric of the crank in No. 26 Frog Island and the men were at work endeavouring to extricate him. The weight of the wheel was seventeen tons and it had pinned him to the wood block by his left breast and shoulder. He was lying face downwards on the right hand side of the wheel race and was quite dead. The witness, who was overcome by his recital, proceeded to state how he secured help and got the body out.

NEED FOR TOP TACKLE

Albert Jones, a foreman of engineers, R.C.D., living at 110 Eglinton Road, Plumpstead, said he instructed the deceased to proceed to the engine shop No. 26, to lower the crank shaft into its new bearings which had been fitted for it. The witness had investigated the engine the day previous and it was all right for work. The huge wheel was supported by blocks of wood under the spokes, which blocks were removed piece by piece to lower the wheel on to its bearings. Nine men were at work

on the job, of whom the deceased was in charge. The witness did not see the deceased after twenty passed two when he sent him to do the job, until shortly after three when he was dead. The deceased had the full arrangements for the erection of the packing and also of the lowering of the shaft.

By the foreman: The deceased could have as much assistance as he required. The witnesses considered that the eight men he had to assist him were sufficient.

By a juryman: Do you not consider that a skilled engineer should be present?

Witness: No. There was a fitter present, and he was sufficient for the mere lowering of a shaft.

The juryman: You don't consider that an engineer was necessary?

Witness: The fitter was an engineer, and he had great experience.

By the coroner: Two of the men were engineers, one at each end of the shaft, who had adjusted the bearings ready to receive the shaft.

Another juryman: You attribute the lurching over of the wheel to defective packing. Is there not a proper means of tackle to hold the top of the wheel and prevent its lurching?

The Witness: That is clearly seen by the plan. There were two 30 Ton jacks to regulate it, and carry the whole weight.

The coroner: Do you not think that such a weight of machinery should have been supported from above?

Witness: I don't know.

The coroner: It would have prevented the accident would it not?

Witness: Yes it would have done so, but it is seldom done as there is not room enough in the general way.

The coroner: Was there in this case?

Witness: Yes sir.

The coroner: And it was not done?

Witness: No sir.

DECEASED WAS RESPONSIBLE

The coroner: Could the deceased, had he chosen, ordered tackle to be used from above?

Witness: Oh, yes, sir, it was at his command had he thought it necessary. There was no restriction placed upon him. He thought the deceased was a man of sufficient experience to depute such work to.

A juryman said he had worked on that kind of work, and he thought the deceased quite understood his work.

The coroner: That is merely an expression of opinion.

By Captain Owen: The shaft had never been lifted by tackle before.

Captain Owen: My opinion is that is better without in that place.

Witness in reply to Captain Owen said that the use of tackle might have been a preventative, certainty.

Maurice Prout, of 44 Maxey Road, Plumpstead, a labourer under the deceased, who was present at the time of the accident, said there were four labourers, two fitters' mates, and Sullivan present. He said the packing was in good condition and the jacks were working properly and the deceased inspected all himself. The deceased took the place of the witness at the jack, saying that he thought he would lower it easier than the witness. The witness went on to describe how the wedges were knocked away and the wheel being lowered two inches, the weight was on the jacks, it was when he was knocking out the 1 1/2 inch piece that the wheel shot over backwards carrying the jacks with it and pinned the deceased as had been already described. The deceased never said a word, but a moment before had been giving orders for the wheel to be lowered. The witness could not say what had caused the accident as the weight was all on the jacks.

In reply to the coroner the witness said he thought they could have done with two more labourers there, although he thought the wheel would have gone over if there had been fifty labourers there.

By a juryman: He did not know what gave way whether it was the jack or not.

By Captain Owen: He did not know whether the jacks were being lowered at the time.

A NON-COMMITTAL WITNESS

Henry Corsham, an engine fitter - working in the Arsenal, of Hercules Street, New Cross, said he was present at the time of the accident, assisting in the work. He had his spirit level on the shaft, the object being to keep the shaft level whilst being lowered. It was being lowered alright and the witness was standing close to the deceased, who was lowering the jack. The wheel began to tremble and the witness had to jump away from where he was standing, for in a few seconds the wheel fell and the witness had a narrow escape. By the appearance of the deceased it was evident that he also saw the danger and had turned away from the jack with a view to escaping.

By the coroner: He could not say what his opinion was as to the use of tackle from above. He had seen it used, but not in the engine room. He could not say if had it been used it would have prevented the accident.

By a juror: The wheel was lifted nearly two feet out of its bearings.

By another juror: There were no guide ropes or tackle and if one jack gave way there was nothing to prevent it going over.

John Grady of 22 Abbey Road, Plumpstead, a labourer who was at work on the other jack at the time of the accident said he only lowered the jack at Sullivan's orders, which he had done about a minute before the accident. Sullivan had just said "All

right, jack." when the wheel skidded and fell. The witness was knocked over and thrown among the packing and did not see whether his jack fell over or not.

By Captain Owen: He was not lowering the wheel when it heeled over. He could not say what Sullivan was doing.

CAUSE OF ACCIDENT A MYSTERY

David Brown of 51 Craighton Road, Eltham, an engineer fitter, working on the job at the time of the accident, said they had lowered the shaft some inches when he heard Sullivan cry, "Look out." and he saw the wheel lurch quite four feet away from the main bearings. The witness was pushed on one side by the falling shaft and rushing round, saw the deceased pinned.

By the coroner: It was impossible for him to say what caused the accident, but he saw Sullivan look through the wheel and speak to Grady immediately before, and it then lurched over in the direction away from the deceased.

James C. Samson, of the R.A.M.C., of 26 The Common, Woolwich, said he was called to the deceased in the engine house. He was very severely crushed on the left side of the body. The ribs penetrating the lung, his face was discoloured and he was bleeding from his nose. Death was due to shock following the fracture of the ribs and internal injuries.

The coroner said it was clear that at the time of the accident the wheel was resting entirely on the jacks. They had it in evidence that the jacks were standing on packing and that on top of the narrow top of the jack there was more packing, and a displacement or defect in any of that packing might have caused the accident. Then they had it in evidence that there was no top tackle, whilst had there been so it would have prevented the accident. (A jurymen: "Quite so"). On the other hand they heard that Sullivan could have had the top tackle had he desired and was responsible for the job.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death" and added a rider that block and tackle should be used from above for the purpose as most of them being practical engineers (to quote the words of the foreman) they had never known of machinery being handled in the way shown in evidence.

AN APPEAL FOR THE WIDOW AND CHILDREN.

To the Editor of the "Kentish Independent."

Sir, - I am requested to receive subscriptions on behalf of the widow and eight children of the late Mr. James Sullivan, whose sad death a week ago so greatly shocked his fellow townsmen. I shall esteem it a favour if you will announce in your columns that I willingly accede to the request. I enclose a copy of a letter from Mr. T. Palmer, who is acting as secretary to the fund, which, I feel sure will in itself be sufficient to appeal to the well known generosity of Woolwich townsmen when a deserving case as the present requires assistance. - Believe me, yours, etc.

L. JENKINS JONES (Mayor). Town Hall, Woolwich. 3rd February 1904

To his Worship the Mayor of Woolwich.

Sir, - Last week the inhabitants of Woolwich were shocked to hear that another unfortunate and unforeseen accident had occurred in the Royal Arsenal, this time in the Carriage Department, by which one poor fellow, James Sullivan by name, lost his life. He leaves a widow and eight children, the eldest 16 years of age, the youngest a baby if five months old and in addition to these, his aged mother was dependent on his earnings. By permission of the Superintendent, Major F. F. Fisher, R.A., we have opened a subscription list in the Carriage Department to which the employees are contributing in a very hansom manner. But I have already received one subscription from a lady in the town and she is probably one of many who would like to help so deserving a case. I wish therefore, to ask if you can see your way clear to announce through the columns of our local papers, etc etc., that any of our fellow townsmen who would care to subscribe can do so through you, and that according to the amount so raised you will be prepared to nominate members on our relief committee. - I am your obedient servant, T. PALMER. Labourers' Branch. R.C.D. 3rd February 1904

FOR WIDOW AND ORPHANS

WHO WILL HELP

On page 7 we give an account of the sad circumstances attending the death by accident in the Royal Arsenal of Mr. James Sullivan, and a proposal made to establish a fund for the benefit of his widow and children.

Last night (Thursday) a Provisional Committee was formed to carry out this estimable object, consisting of the following gentlemen; The Mayor of Woolwich, (the Rev. L. Jenkins Jones, J.P.), Messrs D. Palmer, and Parker, trustees; Mr. Guilly, hon. Treasurer; and Mr. Percy Godfrey, hon. secretary.

Subscriptions may be sent to the Mayor at the Town Hall, or to Mr. Gregory, 20 Bower Street, Woolwich.

We are pleased to hear that over £100 has already been subscribed.

Will our readers do what they can to help?

Kentish Independent February 12th 1904

SULLIVAN FUND

The Mayor wishes to thankfully acknowledge the receipt of the following donations to the above fund, and will be very pleased to receive any further contributions: - The Mayor. £1 1s. ; Mr. Councillor J. J. Messent, £1 1s. ; Professor Gault, 10s. ; Mr. Geo. T. Jelley, 10s.