



## CORONERS INQUESTS



### Death & Inquest of Mr. E. F. Colston, Esq. of Roundway Park

It is with sincere regret that we record the death of the above estimable gentleman. Which took place on Friday last under very melancholy circumstances.

Mr. Colston, it appears, had risen at his usual early hour on Friday morning, and took a walk round the grounds. He returned shortly before 9, and having read family prayers, partook of breakfast with his daughter. In excellent health and spirits he then proceeded to the park, as was his daily practice, to see the labourers at work – having previously told his daughter that he expected some friends to lunch, and that he should be at home to join them. Alas ! Within half an hour from this time he was a corpse ! At the bottom of a glen in the park there are fish ponds, the banks on either side of which are remarkably steep and in some places dangerous: - so steep, indeed, and so near the edge of the water, that (as was stated in evidence by Dr. Everett) if a person in descending one of them, were in any way to lose his balance, either from walking carelessly, or from an attack of giddiness, it would be scarcely possible for him to avoid falling into it. Mr. Colston had reached those banks, and, having asked a question of a gardener in an adjoining field, proceeded (as the gardener thought) in the direction of the grotto gate – a short walk distance along the banks, whilst the gardener went on with his work. About half an hour afterwards, a labourer, with whom Mr. Colston had, in his walk, held a short conversation, came with another labourer to the pond, to fetch their tools, and there they discovered the body of a man, which they afterwards found to be that of their master, floating on the water. Whether it was from want of proper caution in endeavouring to descend the banks, as Mr. Colston is represented to have been a careless walker; or whether he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, to which it is said he was predisposed, cannot with certainty be ascertained – but there is no doubt that he fell into the pond, and that falling with his face downwards, he had no power to extricate himself. Unfortunately the two labourers who first discovered him, instead of immediately taking the body from the water, went to the house to state the fact, and by the delay prevented the possibility – if possibility there had previously been – of resuscitating it. Of course every means that could be suggested for the purpose were resorted to, but without effect.

The death of Mr. Colston has occasioned very deep regret throughout the neighbourhood. Of a cheerful and amiable disposition – courteous, affable and kind hearted, he was universally beloved. His chief delight appeared to be in “living at home” - in improving his estate – in employing the poor and rendering assistance to the sick and the needy – and in dispensing hospitalities to his friends and neighbours. Mr. Colston was a lineal descendant of the great philanthropist of that name, and was in the 52nd year of his age. He remains will be interred within the church of the Chapelry of St. James on Saturday next.

An inquest was on Monday last held on the body, before Mr. W. H. Whitmarsh, and a highly respectable jury, composed of the following gentlemen :- Mr. T. H. Grubbe (foreman), Mr. F. Locke,

Mr. Nisbet, Mr. J. Locke, Mr. Simon Watson Taylor, Mr. Schomberg, Mr. Carter, Mr. Tinker, Mr. T. Brown, Mr. G. E. Sloper, Mr. H. Clarke, Mr. Armstrong, Mr. H. Butcher, Mr. Chandler, Mr. W. Brown, Mr. Hull, Mr. Compton, Mr. Burt, Mr. Heywood, and Mr. Mark Sloper.

The first witness examined was James Hampton, a footman at Roundway Park, who deposed as follows:- On Friday morning last, the 9th of April, my master came down stairs at 7 o'clock (his usual time) when he took a walk round the grounds, and returned about 5 minutes before 9. As soon as the household was assembled he read family prayers, and breakfast followed, which he partook of heartily. He breakfasted alone with Miss Colston (his daughter). The only thing I heard him say was to enquire of me how his son William (who was unwell upstairs) was, and how he had passed the night? I saw my master no more after breakfast, nor until he was brought home a corpse a few minutes after 11 o'clock the same morning.

George Bigwood, of Devizes, labourer, was next sworn :- I was in Mr. Colston's employ on Friday morning last the 9th of April. I was cleaning the walk which leads directly from the house to the fish ponds in Roundway Park, when, about 5 minutes before I heard the clock strike 10 Mr. Colston came up from the house, and asked me where Pike and Harraway (who had been at work with me on the paths leading to the fish ponds the preceding day) were? I told him, and he went on towards the fish ponds. It was his ordinary practice to come and see his labourers at work, as he did that morning. About half an hour after Mr. Colston left me, I went down with John Pike to the ponds to fetch some tools which we had left there. As I passed the fish ponds I saw something lying in the water. I at first thought it was a scare crow, but upon further examination we found that it was the body of a man. It was lying lengthways and nearly five feet from the edge of the pond, with the face downwards. We immediately ran off to Roundway Park House for assistance. At the point of the pond at which the body was found the bank is very steep, and any person passing from the gate leading to the grotto (the shortest way to the wooden bridge over the ponds) would have to pass across the steep ground immediately above the place where the body was found. If any person passing in that direction were to slip, I don't think that he would recover himself, but that he would fall into the pond.

James Willis, gardener, in the employ of Mr. George King of Devizes. Said: - I was at work for my master at Newlands on the 9th of April, sowing coal ashes. Mr. Colston came up to me about 10 minutes past 10 o'clock, and asked me what I was sowing? I told him coal ashes; upon which he remarked "I suppose to bring up the clover;" and he then passed on in the direction of the grotto gate.

Joseph Thomas, coachman to the late Mr. Colston, said:- A quarter before 9 o'clock last Friday morning my master came to the stable and enquired about the horses. One of the carriage horses was lame and had had physic. He told me to ascertain of Mr. Vincent, the veterinary surgeon, whether, for a certainty the sick horse would be able to work on the Sunday, for he said that is was very unpleasant to borrow, and that if Mr. Vincent could not say for certain that the horse would be fit to work on Sunday, I was to go to Bath and get another to supply its place. He then left me and went into the house. I saw him come out again a few minutes before 10 o'clock, when he passed towards the lawn. In about an hour afterwards, in consequence of its being stated that some person was in the fish pond, I went off immediately, in company with others, to the spot, and there I saw the deceased Mr. Colston lying with his face downwards a short distance from the edge of the water. We took him out, and he was quite dead. Dr Everett was sent for directly. The bank is very steep at the point where the body was found. Master was a very careless walker, and has often hurt himself by stumbling. If he were coming the shortest way from the grotto gate to the bridge, across the pond, he would have to pass over the steep ground immediately above where the body was found, and if he stumbled he must go into the water, and nothing could save him.

William Giffard Everett, M.D. - On the morning of Friday the 9th inst., having been sent for at about 11 o'clock, I went to one of the ponds in Roundway Park, called Bascombe Ponds, and found the body of the late Mr. Colston lying on the ground, opposite to the situation in which, it was stated, to have been found in the water. Life appeared to be entirely extinct, and the body was quite cold, with the exception of a trifling degree of warmth in the upper part of the trunk. I, however, had it immediately removed to the house, where I employed the usual means of resuscitation, which were persevered in for a considerably time, but, of course, with the unsuccessful result which could alone be expected under such hopeless circumstances, the period of submersion having, I should think, been nearly or quite an hour. The body presented no evidence whatever of violence or injury. My opinion is that death was caused by drowning, but, it is, at the same time, impossible to say, that a slight attack of congestive apoplexy, such as would not itself occasion death, or leave any signs after death distinguishable, as to its effects on the brain, from those of suffocation by drowning, may not, indirectly have contributed to the fatal result. Mr. Colston's full habit of body predisposed him to apoplectic disease. Having stated what I know of the *facts* of the case, perhaps I may be allowed to make an *observation* respecting it, which is that in going to the spot where the body was placed, which, of course, on such an occasion, I did by the nearest and most direct route, down the hill, and not round the footpath, I could not help being struck with what, I am sure, must have occurred to everyone, under similar circumstances, and that was the extremely dangerous nature of the situation, as regards the water. The gentlemen present are aware that these fish ponds are at the bottom of a kind of glen or ravine, and the banks are in many parts, to steep, and so near to the edge of the water, that, if a person in descending one of them, were in any way to lose his balance, either from walking carelessly, or from an attack of giddiness, or any other cause, it would be scarcely possible for him, especially if moving with the momentum by which a heavy person would, in such a case, be impelled, to avoid falling into it

Other witnesses were in attendance, but it was thought unnecessary to call the, The Jury returned their verdict – Found drowned.

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