



CORONERS INQUESTS



(Bishopstone, near Swindon)

INQUEST

An inquest was held on Friday, the 6th inst., at the True Heart, in this village, before Coroner Whitmarsh and a jury of fourteen, on the body of a **child** [Robert], 12 weeks old, son of **William Nash**, a labourer.

Mr. J. Williams was chosen foreman of the jury. The jury first viewed the body, which our correspondent informs us was little more than a skeleton, and then returned to the True Heart, where the first witness called was Mr. P. Morse, relieving officer of No. 2 District of the Highworth and Swindon Union, who stated that on Tuesday, Feb 3rd, he had occasioned to be at Bishopstone. On his arrival there he received a message from the mother of the child requesting him to call respecting the same.

He immediately went to the house, where he found Mrs. Nash absent, but another woman, Maria Johnson, was there attending to the child, and she asked him for an order for a medical man. He looked at the child and noticed it appeared nearly dead, and just after his having written out the order it expired in his (Mr. Morse's) presence. He had never before been applied to in this case, neither was he aware of the state of the child, or he would have given an order.

Dr. Fernie, the medical officer for the same district, said that the first thing that came to his knowledge respecting the case was an order written out by Mr. Hickman and sent to Stratton by some person who had given it to one of his children in the street about five o'clock in the evening of Tuesday, the 3rd inst. It stated on the order that the child was suffering from water on the brain. He did not receive this order till later on in the evening, and did not consider water on the brain a very urgent case. On going to Bishopstone on the following morning he found the child was dead, death having taken place about two o'clock the previous day, before he was sent for. He had the child stripped and examined: there were no marks of injury. In answer to the Coroner, Mr. Fernie said in his opinion the child had been a weakly one since birth, and that death arose through mesenteric disease, and probably inflammation of the bowels.

By the Jury: Could not tell exactly what the weight of a child the age of deceased should be, they varied so. Could not tell without weighing if the child weighed 7 lb. or more. There had certainly been great neglect on the part of the parents in not applying before for proper assistance. It was quite probable that if that if proper precaution had been taken in time and the child well cared for the result might have been different.

Elizabeth Nash, the mother, was then called, and stated that the child was twelve weeks old; it had been weakly since its birth. She had never called the attention of any medical man to it until three weeks ago, when she showed it to Dr. Kennard. He told her it had the white mouth, and gave her instructions. By a Juror: She gave the deceased the breast up to the day of its death. Still pressed by the Juryman, witness said she gave deceased new milk sop and a little honey. She never but on two evenings took the child out; had taken it about in the day time, as she was obliged to for shopping, &c. Cod liver oil was recommended, but could give none for want of money until Monday night. Did not apply to the relieving officer until Tuesday, as she knew it would be no good, she wouldn't get anything if she had.

The Coroner thought there had been a deal of time elapsed before the mother had attempted to get assistance, as the child, according to her own testimony, had been wasting away for several weeks and no one applied to for assistance.

The foreman of the Jury was of the same opinion and added some very strong remarks as to the general

dirty state of the family.

The Jury, after sitting for about three hours, returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence adding a censure on the mother for not obtaining parochial assistance – which she might have done. Mrs Nash was then called, and the Coroner severely reprimanded and cautioned her.

The Jury were also of opinion that the inquiry had been most desirable, and whoever had been the means of bringing the matter to light deserved thanks.

P.C. Read had the arrangement of the jury &c.

The case was mentioned at the meeting of the Board of Guardians, at Stratton, on Wednesday last. Mr. Morse had been applied to by Nash for means of burial of the poor unfortunate child, as he could not possibly do it himself, being only in receipt of a weekly wage of 10s. As Mr. Morse had been threatened by the auditor to be surcharged with the amount if he granted aid in such cases, the matter was taken out of his hands – as a relieving officer – with the consequence that the remains of the child were then lying unburied at Nash's cottage. But it was understood the Overseers had ordered the burial to take place that day, eight days after the death !.

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 14 February 1880