



# CORONERS INQUESTS



## Dreadful Calamity by Fire

It has seldom fallen our lot to record an accident of a more appalling nature than has occurred at the village or Winterbourne Stoke, about eight miles from this city, an accident originating in carelessness and thoughtlessness, and causing the sudden destruction by fire of no less than seven human beings! The fire broke out between one and two o'clock on Thursday morning last, in a large house belonging to Mr. George Kellow, occupied as two tenements: in one end of the house a shopkeeper and his family resided; in the other two families, consisting of nine poor persons, seven of whom, shocking to relate, were burnt to death. The fire was not discovered till the whole latter part of the building was enveloped in flames; and it appears that it was occasioned by Mary Adlem (one of the sufferers) having, previously to going to bed, placed some ashes near to a bundle of heath, in a buttery not far from the fire-place. The names of the unfortunate sufferers were Christiana Adlem, aged 80 years, Mary Adlem, aged 40 and her daughter Eliza, aged three years; Jane Target, aged 63; Ann Davis, aged 22, and her infant daughter Jane, aged ten months; and Elizabeth Wilkins, aged 17 years. James Davis (the husband of Ann Davis) escaped with great difficulty, saving one of his children, three years old.

This poor man, in the fright of the moment, leapt from the window to the ground; but recollecting the danger which his wife and children were exposed, he re-entered the house, and ascended into the chamber; at that time the women of both apartments were running about in an agony of despair; he caught his eldest child with his left hand, and with his right dragged the mother, clasping her infant to her bosom, down the staircase; but by some means the wife became disengaged from his grasp and was lost with her infant in the flames which surrounded them. The father, bursting through the door which was on fire, again reached the outside with his child, but both were dreadfully burnt. The roof at this moment fell in, burying in the mass of fire (in addition to the mother and her infant) the four women and the child who remained behind. The family of the shopkeeper, occupying the other part of the house, and consisting of seven persons escaped unhurt. The fire then communicated with a barn, stable, granary and outhouses, the whole of which was consumed, together with about 330 fleeces of wool and a few sacks of vetches; a loss altogether but trifling, when compared with the sacrifice of the lives of five women and two children. The scorched and mutilated bodies of the unfortunate victims, were removed from the ruins in the course of the day to a barn, where Mr. Whitmarsh, one of the coroners of the county, held an inquest on them, and sufficient evidence being produced that their death was occasioned by an accidental fire, a verdict to that effect was returned by the jury. Mr. Whitmarsh went to the house where the survivors were, and took the deposition of James Davis, who stated as follows: "that he, his wife, and two children, were all asleep on Thursday morning, when they were awaked by Mary Adlem, crying out, 'we are all on fire!' that his wife immediately said it was owing to Mary Adlem having put ashes into the buttery; he (the deponent) got out of the chamber window, and went to a well, and got a bucket of water, but found it was of no use; he then returned into the house, and tried to save his wife and children; the former had her infant at her breast. And he took the other with him; his wife following, when the roof fell in, and he never saw her after."

It is impossible to describe the horrid spectacle which the burnt bodies presented. The unfortunate girl, Elizabeth Wilkins, was almost entirely consumed; the bodies of the remainder were most dreadfully scorched, and quite black, the greater part of them having legs burnt off, and their bowels and lungs exposed to view. But the most shocking of all to behold, was the body of Ann Davis, with that of her infant still clinging to her breast!

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