



SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



Larkhill

William Humphreys – Australian Soldier

30th March, 1917

Fatal Motor-Car Accident near Amesbury

An inquest was held at Fargo Hospital on Thursday by the Coroner for South Wilts (Mr F. H. Trethowan), in regard to the death of Private William Humphreys, an Australian soldier, which occurred as the result of being knocked down by a motor-car when walking back to Larkhill Camp from Amesbury on the previous Sunday evening.

Corporal J. M. Stanlan, of the Training Battalion, AIF, stationed at Larkhill, said he found Humphreys lying in the gutter on the road leading from Amesbury to Larkhill. He was breathing very heavily, and as nobody standing by seemed to be doing anything for him, he took charge and had him conveyed in a car to Fargo Hospital.

The Coroner: Was there anything to show you whether the injured man was sober or not?

Witness: He had a bottle in his pocket, and he may have taken that out on the way.

Lieutenant H. Cameron Wilson, Royal Army Medical Corps, stationed at Fargo, said the man was admitted to hospital on March 18th. He was alive, but unconscious, and was obviously suffering from concussion of the brain. There was a wound on the back of his head where he had been struck. He died on the 19th inst., about nine hours after admission, without having regained consciousness, the cause of death being concussion of the brain.

The Coroner: Was there any evidence at all that he had been drinking?

Witness: His breath smelt very strongly of drink.

PC Adlam, stationed at Durrington, stated that he received a report that an accident had occurred in the parish of Amesbury on Sunday evening, and ascertained that the injured man was Private William Humphreys, that his age was 36 years, and that his home address was 14, Sidney Street, Victoria, Australia. He also found that at the time of the accident another private of the AIF, named William George Lorimer, was in Humphrey's company. He saw Lorimer, and took the following statement from him:

“On Sunday, March 18th, I was coming from Amesbury to Larkhill about 9pm, in company with Private Humphreys, of the same Battalion. About a quarter of a mile from Amesbury I saw a motor-

car coming in the opposite direction with bright lights. I walked across the other side of the road, and left Humphreys on the left-hand side of the road, and when the car passed I heard a bump as if the car had knocked something. I went back about five yards, and saw Humphreys lying in the road. The car pulled up, and the driver came back. I and several other soldiers put him in the car and took him to Fargo hospital. I should think the car was travelling about 14 to 15 miles an hour. We had been to Amesbury, and had a few drinks, but Humphreys was not drunk.”

For a considerable time the Coroner waited for Lorimer to attend to give evidence, then decided to proceed without him.

Arthur Sidney Hughes, the driver of the car, who had joined the Army since the accident, chose to give evidence. He stated that on March 18th he was driving a car from Larkhill to Amesbury, and after passing over the level crossing, he saw a soldier in the middle of the road, and a man on the other side of the road. Witness was travelling on the left hand side of the road, and he swerved to the left to give the soldier more room, but he also lurched in that direction, and was struck by the right-hand side mudguard and knocked down. He pulled up the car and went back, and took the soldier to Fargo Hospital in the car.

The Coroner: Do you think you could have avoided the collision when you first saw the man in the road by slowing down?

Witness: I did slow down.

The Coroner: What pace were you going when you actually reached them?

Witness: About 14 or 15 miles an hour.

The Coroner: Lorimer says they were both on the left-hand side, and that he went across to the right?

Witness: There was one on the left-hand side, one on the right, and deceased was in the middle.

The Coroner: You said he lurched. Was he actually staggering?

Witness: He was walking unsteadily.

A verdict of “Accidental death” was returned.

Extract published with kind permission from [Salisbury Inquests](#)

** Pte William Humphreys, 7017, 7th Battalion A.I.F. was buried in Durrington Cemetery.