

### January 12 1892

SUSPICIOUS DROWNING CASE AT COSELEY Yesterday Mr W H Phillips (coroner) held an inquest at the Anchor Inn, Deepfields, touching the death of John Willie Barrett (9), the son of John Barrett, a fireman, employed at the Steel Works, Spring Vale, whose body was found in the canal. The father stated that on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst his son brought his breakfast, and afterwards started for home, carrying with him two cans. At the time it was broad daylight, and the boy had on an overcoat with a tippet. Later in the day, witness's wife came to the works, and said the boy had not returned home. Witness dragged the canal for two days and nights without success. On Friday the body was discovered in the boat dock at Deepfields. The cans and the overcoat were missing. He could not think the boy took off his overcoat, for it was a cold morning, and he had not more than a half mile to walk. He, however, failed to see any marks of violence on the body. His son was a sharp, intelligent lad. Some time ago he lost a can and £1 3s 6d, and he then stated that a boatman had taken the money from him, but this man could not be found. He could not in any way account for the boy getting in the water, or the loss of the overcoat. The Coroner asked if the garment was buttoned when the boy left; and Barrett said it was. Mr Phillips : It is mysterious that the overcoat is missing. Enoch Fellows said he saw the boy returning from his father's works with his overcoat on, and he was then only a hundred yards from the place where his body was found. He saw no tramps about. The Coroner (to the father) : Did you drag for the overcoat after the body was found? Witness : No; I had been dragging for two nights and days. Continuing, Barrett said the thought the boy had got into the water by foul means. Dr Baker had seen the body. In answer to the jury, witness said he knew of no one who would interfere with his son. He had travelled the same road eight or nine months. The Coroner thought a *post mortem* examination had better be made, in order to see if there were any marks of violence on the head or elsewhere. The inquest would be adjourned for a week, and in the meantime the police would make the most diligent enquiries.

### January 19 1892

THE MYSTERIOUS DROWNING CASE AT DEEPFIELDS Yesterday Mr W H Phillips resumed an enquiry at the Anchor Inn, Deepfields, touching the death of John Willie Barrett (9), the son of a workman at the Spring Vale Works near Bilston. It has been reported that the boy, who was well and warmly clad, took his father's breakfast to the works, and started on his return home. He never reached there, and his body was found in the canal minus the overcoat, although he was seen within 100 yards of the spot wearing the garment. He had complained previously of being molested by a boatman, and the enquiry was adjourned a week ago for enquiries. Mr Baker, surgeon, now stated that he had made a *post mortem* examination, and death was due to drowning. The father of the deceased said the canal had been dragged frequently since the last enquiry, but no overcoat had been found. The Coroner said it was certainly a mysterious circumstance that the coat was not found; and Police-sergeant Ellis stated that the fullest enquiries had been made. The jury returned an open verdict.

### February 9 1892

THE CANAL MYSTERY AT DEEPFIELDS At Bilston yesterday, **Jeremiah Edwards** (24), labourer of Engine Street, Tat Bank, Oldbury and **Richard Williams** (27), boatman of Lower Chapel Street, Tividale, were brought up before Mr T Holcroft, charged on suspicion with causing the death of John Willie Barrett (9) and stealing a coat, cap, and breakfast can, the property of Barrett's father. Police-inspector Bishop of Old Hill stated that, in company with Police-constable Moreton, he went on Saturday to Oldbury and, with Superintendent Speke, made enquiries with regard to the charges now preferred against the prisoners. He saw Williams at Tividale, and in answer to enquiries he said he pulled the things out of the canal and put them in the boat. "Jerry" he said had the can and cap, and he had the coat. At Dudley Port, however, he put his share of the articles in the canal again. The coat was a blue one, with a cape on. Williams said he told "Jerry" he should give information to the police, but "Jerry" suggested that they should take the things home, as they might get into a bother if they left them. Witness and Moreton afterwards arrested Edwards in a public house at Tat Bank. He was then under the influence of drink. Yesterday morning he confronted the two men, and witness read Williams's statement to Edwards, who replied that when he saw Williams take the cap, can, coat and saucers out of the canal, he told him he had better fetch a policeman. He (Edwards) hooted to some men near the Ten Score Bridge, and asked them if they had seen anyone with some breakfast things, and they said they had not; and then Williams said they would take the things home and "make a drink". Inspector Harrison said one of the prisoners was the steerer of a boat, and the other man the driver. Williams had stated that he had the coat and can, and had sunk them at Tividale, and would point out the place; and Edwards had stated that he had the cap and had given it to one of his relations. Williams here said as soon as he pulled the things out of the water he "made complaints". The prisoners were remanded for

eight days.

### **February 17 1892**

**THE DEEPFIELDS CANAL MYSTERY** The mystery surrounding the death of John Willie Barrett, aged nine years, whose parents reside in Anchor Yard, Deepfields, still remains unravelled. It may be remembered that the deceased left his home on the 6<sup>th</sup> January to take his father's breakfast to the Spring Vale Furnaces, Bilston. He did not return, and his body was afterwards found in the canal a short distance from his home, an open verdict being returned at the inquest. Subsequently, Jeremiah Edwards (24), boatman, of Engine Street, Tat Bank, Oldbury, and **Richard Williams** (27), boatman, Chapel Street, Tividale, were ascertained to have made statements with regard to clothing and breakfast tins believed to have been in the possession of the boy when he was drowned, and they were apprehended. They then made very contradictory statements on the subject. The prisoners were brought up again at the Bilston Police Court yesterday, charged with causing the death of the boy and stealing his coat, cap and a breakfast can. Mr R A Willcock (Willcock and Taylor, Wolverhampton) now appeared to conduct the proceedings on behalf of the Public Prosecutor, and asked for a further remand in order that the police might be enabled to make further enquiries. He intended to prefer a charge of murder against the prisoners. Inspector Bishop repeated the evidence which has already been published as to statements made by the prisoners, and they were again remanded for a week, bail being refused.

### **February 24 1892**

**THE ALLEGED MURDER OF A BOY AT DEEPFIELDS** The magisterial investigation into the circumstances attending the death of John Willie Barrett (9) of Anchor Yard, Deepfields, whose body was found in the Birmingham Canal at Deepfields on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, was resumed at the Bilston Police Court yesterday, when **Richard Williams** (27), of 34 Lower Chapel Street, Tividale, and **Jeremiah Edwards** (24), Engine Street, Tat Bank, Oldbury, two boatmen, were again charged on remand with the wilful murder of the boy, and further with stealing a coat, cap and can, the property of the boy's father. Mr R A Willcock conducted the case for the Public Prosecutor, and Mr J Clark defended. Mr Willcock, in opening the case, stated that on January 6<sup>th</sup> the deceased was sent with his father's breakfast to Sir Alfred Hickman's Spring Vale Works. He was seen by a man named Fellows returning home along the canal side near the Ten Score Bridge. He was then wearing a blue pilot overcoat and cap. It was a bitterly cold day, and it was not likely that he would take the coat off himself, as it fitted very tightly and he was unable to unbutton it without assistance. It was then about nine o'clock in the morning, and from that time the lad was not seen alive. The canal was dragged, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> January his body was found within one hundred yards of the place where he was last seen by Mr Fellows. It was then minus the coat and cap, and the breakfast utensils, a can and saucer, were also missing. On the 6<sup>th</sup> January the two prisoners were in charge of a boat belonging to Messrs Chance of the Alkali Works, Oldbury, which was proceeding to Wolverhampton, and they were near the place where the deceased was last seen alive. On the evening of the same day Edwards entered the Navigation Inn at Tat Bank, Oldbury, and remarked that he and his mate had had a good day, as they had found a lad's coat and cap in the canal at Deepfields, but they had hurried on for fear of being "collared". An inquest was held on the body, and when Edwards went to the Navigation Inn again he was advised to give the articles up which he had found. He then made no reply. An advertisement describing the articles was subsequently inserted in an evening paper, and Edwards, on visiting the Navigation Inn, was once more advised to give up the things he had found, but he replied, "If they want the things they must fetch them". The prisoners were afterwards questioned by the police, and they then stated that they found the things in the canal, and as they feared to attend the inquest they sank the coat in the canal near to Holcroft's works at Tividale. The coat had since been recovered at the place described by the prisoners. Witnesses were then called. John Barrett, the father of the boy, deposed to the deceased bringing his breakfast on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> January. He started to return home about ten minutes to nine o'clock, and was then wearing a tight fitting overcoat, which he was unable to put on or take off himself. As the boy did not return home, witness had the canal dragged, and the body was found two days later. The coat, cap and breakfast utensils were then missing. Enoch Fellows of 10 Broad Lane, Bilston, deposed that he was working on a pit bank near the Ten Score Bridge, on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> January, and saw the deceased returning home. He was then wearing the coat and cap and carrying the breakfast things. Evidence having been given that the prisoners went with a boat to Wolverhampton on the day the boy was lost, and returned to Oldbury the same night, **Hannah Tolley**, the wife of a boatman living by the canal side at Whimsey Bridge, Oldbury, stated that on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, she saw a boat passing her house. Edwards, who was steering, threw a cap to her, and said it would do for her boy Willie. The boy came up at the time, and

he picked up the cap and wore it for some time, but lost it when he fell into a pool. A fortnight afterwards Edwards called to see her, and asked for the cap he had given her for Willie. Witness told him it was lost, and asked him what was the matter. In reply he said, "They are after me about an old hat". Cross-examined : He did not say where he found the cap. Eliza Lloyd, a neighbour of the last witness, deposed to seeing Edwards give her the cap, and repeated the conversation which followed. Edwards said he had found the cap, and a topcoat, handkerchief and saucer in the canal, but he did not state where. Willie Edwards the stepson of Mrs Tolley, also spoke to Edwards giving his mother the cap, on which were the letters "Play up". Thomas Croft Rogers of the Navigation Inn, Tat Bank, Oldbury, stated that on the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> January the prisoner entered the house and said he and his mate had had a good day, as they had found a boy's overcoat and cap in the canal at Deepfields. Witness asked him if he had reported the matter to the police, and he said he had not. He wished to do so, but his mate would not agree to the information being given. Edwards also said that when they found the things he shouted to some men who were working on a wharf nearby and asked them if they had heard of anyone losing an overcoat, and they said, "No". When they were returning they hurried through the "stop" for fear they might be collared. Edwards also added that his mate had given him a shilling for his share of the overcoat, and he also had the tins and cap. On the 18<sup>th</sup> January, after the inquest on the boy, witness again advised Edwards to give the articles he had found to the police. He made no reply then, but when witness spoke to him again on the subject, after the missing articles had been advertised for, Edwards said, "If they want the things they must fetch them". Benjamin Flowers said that on the 6<sup>th</sup> January he was working at a coalpit belonging to Sir Alfred Hickman, near the Ten Score Bridge. He saw a boat passing, and a boatman asked if he had seen a lad on the canal side taking "snapping" anywhere, and added that he had found a can and a cup. Sergeant Ellis of Coseley stated that on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, in company with Police-constable Bayliss, he confronted the prisoner Edwards, and the latter, in reply to questions, denied that he had been out in the direction of Wolverhampton with a boat for two months, as he worked about the dock, and he further stated that he knew nothing about any boatman finding a coat or anything on the canal side. Subsequently he (witness) had a conversation with Mrs Tolley and her son, and in consequence of the statements they made, he again saw Edwards, when he admitted finding the cap on the canal as he was going to Wolverhampton, but denied having seen a boy on the canal side at Deepfields. He added that he had heard the newspaper account of the inquest read, but he knew nothing more of the affair. Inspector Bishop repeated the evidence he gave at a former hearing; and John James, a dredger in the employ of the Birmingham Canal Company, having spoken to fishing the boy's coat out of the canal near to the place where Edwards said it had been sunk, the Bench intimated that the prisoners would be committed for trial. Mr Clark asked for bail, as he said there was no doubt the charge of murder would break down, but it was pointed out to him that bail was never granted in the case where a person was charged with murder.

**March 25 1892** **Staffordshire Assizes**

**Jeremiah Edwards** (24), labourer, and **Richard Williams** (27), boatman, accused of the murder of John Willie Barrett, a boy, at Sedgley, on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

**March 26 1892** **Staffordshire Assizes**

ALLEGED MURDERS The Grand Jury found a true bill in the cases of **Jeremiah Edwards** (24), labourer and **Richard Williams** (27), boatman, who are charged with the wilful murder of John Willie Barrett at Sedgley on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, and also with stealing clothing, the property of John Barrett.

**April 6 1892** **Staffordshire Assizes**

SENTENCES **Jeremiah Edwards** (24), labourer and **Richard Williams** (27), boatman, who were indicted with the wilful murder of a boy named Barrett at Sedgley, but who were acquitted on that count, and found guilty of stealing clothing from the dead boy's body, were each sent to prison for three months with hard labour.