

October 6 1873

SHOCKING DISCOVERY AT BIRMINGHAM

Late on Friday night, whilst two night-soil men were engaged in emptying a midden, in No 6 Court, Oxford Street, Birmingham, they discovered the body of a man in an advanced state of decomposition. The stench was so great that the man who was in the midden at the time was taken away in a fainting state. The body was subsequently removed to an out-house at the Acorn Inn, and after it had been partly cleansed and disinfectants applied it was identified as that of **Thomas Bishop**, son of Mrs Bishop, corn dealer, Cheapside, more familiarly known amongst his companions as "Tommy Don't Care". It was dressed in a loose shirt, cord trousers, which were fastened up by a strap, and a worn jacket and coat. The feet were encased in clogs, but one of these was broken off at the ankle joint by the fork of the labourer who discovered the body. There appears to be some injury to the right temple and nose, but whether this was caused by the night-soil man or is the result of violence is entirely a matter of conjecture. There is, however, a stain resembling blood on the shirt. The deceased was a boatman, and is said to have been much addicted to drinking. He lodged in Bordesley Street, with a man who was generally known as "German John". About six weeks ago deceased was drinking in the Black Horse public house, at the back of which the midden is situated, and went out about two o'clock in the afternoon, in company with another coalheaver, nicknamed "Collier", nothing having since been heard of either of them. It was generally supposed by the friends of the deceased that he had gone to Liverpool, and as he was often away for several weeks at a time with boats, in different parts of the country, no anxiety was felt about him. "Collier", however, has likewise been absent from Birmingham since the day when the two were drinking together, but it is believed that he is now engaged in loading boats in the Cannock Chase district. It was at first thought that the deceased had been murdered, but it is more than probable that, being in drink, he fell over the midden wall, which is only about two feet high, and was suffocated in the night-soil. The midden is situated in a close, crowded court, and emits a stench which fills the atmosphere. It has no covering of any sort, and any stranger going into the foul den in the dark would probably plunge head foremost into a bed of night-soil six or eight feet deep; while a drunken man would be equally liable to share the same fate in the day time. It is stated that a drunken person did fall into the place some time ago, and was rescued in a deplorable state. The last time it was emptied the stench was so pungent that one man was carried home senseless. The Sewage Committee have plenty of work on their hands in removing these filthy abominations from the town, and the sooner they are abolished the better. On Saturday morning the body was identified by the deceased's mother and two brothers. The police are making enquiries into the case, but there is every reason to believe that the occurrence was accidental.