

BIRMINGHAM POST 1914 to 1918

1 9 January 1914

WARWICKSHIRE QUARTER SESSIONS

CANAL BOATMAN'S THEFT **Leonard Brownsell** of Kings Langley, Herts, pleaded guilty to stealing £5 belonging to **Joseph Pearsall**. The men worked a canal boat, and prisoner, while left temporarily in charge, went off with the money. He spent it in local public houses and at Manchester. He had been previously convicted, and was now sent to prison for six months hard labour.

2 15 January 1914

OBSTRUCTING CANAL NAVIGATION

BOATMAN FINED FOR OFFENCES AT TARDEBIGGE **Henry Thomas**, boatman employed by the Severn Carrying Company Limited, was charged at Redditch yesterday with obstructing the navigation of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal at Tardebigge on January 3. Mr G W Hobson prosecuted, and defendant pleaded not guilty.

The evidence showed that about midnight defendant came along the canal in charge of a boat, which had been towed from Birmingham by a steam tug. He was seen by a clerk named William Warner to be tying the boat near the approach to the lock, and was told that could not be allowed. Thomas then tied the boat to a winding apparatus, and upon being remonstrated with, he moved the boat slightly and tied it with a piece of rope from a post to the mast. The canal was obstructed from five o'clock to eight o'clock.

There was a further charge against defendant of assaulting William Warner, toll clerk, at the same time and place.

Defendant was fined 15s and 16s 8d costs, or fourteen days, for the obstruction, and for the assault 40s and 8s 6d costs, or fourteen days.

3 22 January 1914

WEST BROMWICH QUARTER SESSIONS

BOATMAN SENTENCED FOR THEFT **William Durden** (58), a boatman of no fixed abode, pleaded guilty to stealing an overcoat of the value of 18s 6d, the property of Charles Wadlow Harper of Great Bridge, on December 1. Mr Carmichael (instructed by Messrs Sharpe and Darby) prosecuted.

Police-sergeant Hollis said the man would not have any regular employment, but went about the canal from place to place, working occasionally.

He was sentenced to seven months imprisonment, to be followed by a year's police supervision.

4 27 January 1914

BIRMINGHAM QUARTER SESSIONS

HIS FIRST OFFENCE **Jack Smith** (20), boatman, pleaded guilty to breaking into the warehouse of Fellows, Morton and Clayton, and stealing ten feet of canvas. It was stated that there were no previous convictions against the prisoner, who had hitherto borne a good character.

Mr Lewis appeared to prosecute, and said the prisoner was caught in the act of moving the canvas.

Prisoner said the idea was to use the canvas for the purpose of keeping the canvas on his own boat clean.

Smith was bound over in his own recognisance of £5 to come up for judgement if called upon.

5 5 February 1914

BRAVERY RECOGNISED

AWARDS FOR BIRMINGHAM MEN **Thomas Collier** (50), 83 Dudley Road, Springfields near Dudley, boatman, who on November 1 saved George Henry Bevan (7), 6 house, 1 court, Blews Street, Birmingham, from drowning in the canal near Aston Road, into which he had fallen while

playing, was thanked and given a donation of £1. Collier had on two previous occasions saved lives.

6 12 February 1914

INQUESTS IN BIRMINGHAM

DROWNED IN A CANAL The City Coroner (Mr Isaac Bradley) held an inquest yesterday at the Victoria Courts on the body of Elizabeth Priest (41), of 116 Charles Arthur Street, which was found in the canal near Thimble Mill Lane on February 8. The widower said the deceased had been strange in her manner for about a fortnight. He saw her at a quarter to eight on the night of the 7th, when he went out. When he returned the deceased was absent, and he did not see her again alive. He had never heard deceased threaten to take her life. **Richard Cox**, a boatman, spoke of finding the body in the canal about eight o'clock on Sunday morning. A verdict of "Found drowned" was returned.

7 18 February 1914

A SEVERN TRAGEDY

BOATMAN DROWNED IN FLOODED RIVER A remarkable accident occurred in Worcester yesterday on the river Severn, a barge which was coming down stream swerving against the bridge from the main part of the city to St John's, and a man being thrown into the water, much swollen by rains in the north, and drowned in the sight of his son and many people on the banks, who were unable to render assistance.

The victim was a Gloucester man, **Joseph Williams** of 22 Pitt Street. A tug was towing a number of barges down the stream and the stern of a boat came in contact with one of the buttresses in the centre of the bridge. The current here is very strong.

The man's younger son witnessed the tragedy.

8 6 March 1914

WEST BROMWICH BOATMAN DROWNED The body of **William Hall** (49), a boatman who lived at Green Street, West Bromwich, has been recovered by the Smethwick police from the Birmingham Canal near Bridge Street. He had been missing from his home for about a week.

9 9 March 1914

MISTAKEN IDENTITY AT WEST BROMWICH

A "DEAD" MAN'S RETURN An extraordinary case of mistaken identity has occurred at West Bromwich, and has created a great deal of comment. It appears that on Wednesday last week, the body of a man was recovered from the canal near Bridge Street, Smethwick. It was identified as that of **William Hall**, a boatman of Green Street, West Bromwich, who had left his home on the previous Thursday and had not since been heard of. Several friends who knew Hall and a brother identified the body, and at the inquest on Friday a verdict of "Found drowned" was returned, and his relatives made preparations for his funeral, which was to take place yesterday.

Some suspicion, however, was aroused by the fact that the dead man's clothes did not quite correspond with those Hall was wearing when he left home, and on Saturday an intimate friend, who went over to the mortuary at Smethwick to assist in the removal of the body, expressed his conviction that it was not that of Hall, and the body was not removed. The same night, Hall himself turned up at his house, and was greatly perturbed at hearing that arrangements had been made for his funeral, there actually being a number of wreaths at his house. Hall explained his absence by stating that he had gone to Rugeley in search of work, which he was successful in obtaining. Who the dead man is is not known, nor what course will now be adopted, but the facts have been reported to the Coroner.

10 8 April 1914

SENT TO A BORSTAL INSTITUTION **William Holloway** (18), boatman, was sent to a Borstal

institution for three years for stealing a watch and chain from **James Sanders**, boatman, at Napton.

11 10 April 1914

DROWNED IN THE SEVERN

GLOUCESTER BOATMAN'S FATE The Worcester city coroner (Mr Hulme) resumed the inquiry at the Guildhall, Worcester, last night, into the circumstances connected with the death on February 17 of **Joseph Williams** (58), 22 Pitt Street, Gloucester, a canal boatman in the employ of the Severn and Canal Carrying Company. Williams was on a boat which was coming down the Severn, and fell into the water through the boat striking one of the pillars of the bridge. The river was in flood at the time, and Williams quickly disappeared. The body was not recovered for some weeks afterwards. Mr H L Smith, Gloucester, appeared for the Severn and Canal Carrying Company ; Mr G T Wellington, Gloucester, for the Sharpness New Docks Company ; Mr A J Evans, the local secretary of the Dockers Union, attended on behalf of the widow.

Mr Webb, fisherman, who found the body in eleven feet of water, was recalled, and said he accepted the official statement that on the day of the accident there was a rise in the river of 6 ft 5 in. When Williams was drowned, his sixteen year old son, **Ernest**, was in the boat.

The lad now stated that the boat had come from Stourport. It was lashed to another, and the pair were drawn by a tug, the *Athlete*, belonging to the Sharpness New Docks Company. At Worcester Bridge the stern of the tug struck a pillar of one of the arches. They were close to the tug, and the boat struck the pillar. The speed, he thought, was about eight miles an hour. He did not see his father fall out of the boat, and could not say whether he was struck by the pillar. Witness said that he was knocked down and was dazed.

William Mann, Gloucester, a boatman, said the tug, which was steered by a man named **Stiff**, ran against the buttress, and this caused Williams's boat to stern the bridge. Stiff was sober, as was also Williams.

In answer to Mr Smith, witness said the captain of the *Athlete* was in the engine room, the engineer being ill.

Mr Wellington questioned witness upon a statement made at his office, and asked Mann if he thought Stiff was to blame for Williams's death. - Witness : I don't think anything of the sort.

Mr Wellington said Stiff was not to blame, and contended that it was the presence of a check or bridle rope which caused the collision.

Witness said Williams "sanctioned" the bridle rope being put on. If the rope had been wrongly put on it would have affected the steering higher up the river.

The Coroner, interposing when questions were being put to Mann, remarked that it was the purpose of the inquiry to ascertain the cause of Williams's death, and whether there was any negligence. There was no suggestion that Stiff was criminally responsible.

Mr Wellington said criminal responsibility and civil responsibility was only a question of degree, and it was his duty to question witness in view of a statement he had made regarding Stiff.

Joseph Hole, captain of the *Holt Castle* (a steamer), said he had known the river forty six years. He expressed the opinion that the man at the wheel of the tug had no chance with the bridle rope on because he had to look ahead, and could not watch the rope.

Mr Smith : I take it that the captain of the tug has the right to say how a boat shall be fixed before starting and during the voyage? - Yes.

When Stiff was called, Mr Evans asked the coroner if he was going to caution him.

The Coroner said he had not heard anything which he thought made it necessary for him to caution witness.

Staff said he was a bowman on the tug, and on this day he was in charge, the captain being in the engine room. He had been on the river ten years, and had been in full charge of a boat before. When about thirty yards from the bridge the tug swerved, because of the "heave" from the St John's side. He pulled the helm over to fetch the tug back to starboard, but the check rope behind would not allow the tug to turn, and it hit the bridge.

The Coroner : Why didn't you refuse to have the bridle rope on? - Witness said he did not know it

was on until it was too late. Witness did not know Williams had fallen overboard until the tug was 200 yards below.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death" caused by the heave of the tide.

The Foreman said the jury considered there was no one to blame.

12 16 April 1914

WALSALL WOMAN DROWNED The body of Polly Webster (50), Rowland Street, was found in the Birmingham Canal at Old Birchills, Walsall, yesterday, by a boatman named **Samuel James**, of Farringdon Street, Walsall. The woman's husband is lying dangerously ill at home. Mrs Webster, who seemed very much upset, left home on Tuesday night without saying where she was going, and it is not known how she got into the canal.

13 18 April 1914

BOY DROWNED IN THE CANAL AT DUDLEY At the Town Hall, Dudley, yesterday, the Borough Coroner (Mr R Marshall) held an inquest on **George Wood** (5), Malthouse Row, Tipton.

Mrs Saunders said deceased was her son by a former marriage. His step father was a boatman, and recently the family had been living in the cabin of a stationary boat near Blackbrook Bridge, Netherton. On Tuesday she left the children in a boat and arranged for their cousin, a girl aged 15, to look after them while she visited a relative. When she returned, she found the boy was missing when the cousin arrived. Being unable to find the child, she gave information to the police, and the following day the body was discovered in the canal a short distance from the boat.

Dr Griffiths said there were no marks of violence, and death was due to drowning.

A verdict of "Found drowned" was returned.

14 27 May 1914

WEST BROMWICH QUARTER SESSIONS

BOATMEN DISCHARGED **William Hodgetts** (27), a boatman of 1 court, 3 house, Horseley Heath, Tipton, and **Thomas Kenyon Bell** (27), boatman of 16 Horton Street, Greet's Green, were indicted for stealing a quantity of coal of the value of 2s 3d, the property of the Birmingham Canal Company. Mr Riley Pearson (instructed by Wragge and Co, Birmingham) prosecuted, and Mr Carmichael (instructed by Messrs J and L Clark) defended.

It was admitted that the coal was taken from the canal, but the accused said they thought they were not doing any harm, as other people took stuff from the canal. They were found not guilty and discharged.

15 11 June 1914

ASSAULT WITH STONES

NETHERTON BOAT CAPTAIN RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS **Joseph Darby** (35), boatman of Windmill End, Rowley, was charged at Old Hill yesterday with assaulting **Richard Wells**, boat captain of Withymore Road, Netherton, on June 5.

Mr H Sandlands (instructed by Messrs Cambridge and Co, Birmingham) who prosecuted on behalf of the Dockers' Union, said there had been some feeling on the part of prisoner for some time, and it culminated on the date in question, when complainant was attacked by him as he was walking along the canal side at Windmill End. Prisoner threw a number of stones at prosecutor, some of which struck him in the chest, but one caught him in the face, causing a severe wound and rendering him unconscious. After the assault, prisoner rushed to the place, and had to be restrained from striking complainant.

Prisoner admitted the assault, but pleaded provocation, urging that prosecutor had not paid him properly for his work on a canal voyage some months ago.

The Chairman (Mr A H Bassano) said it was a serious assault, and was aggravated by the prisoner's record. He was a violent man, and would have to go to gaol for two months with hard labour.

16 3 July 1914

BIRMINGHAM QUARTER SESSIONS

THEFT FROM A PAWNBROKER **Joseph Styles** (21), boatman, pleaded not guilty to a charge of stealing a skirt and a pair of boots, the property of John Langdon, pawnbroker of Aston Street. According to the evidence for the prosecution, prisoner was seen in company with a woman running away, and when caught by the police a pair of boots, it was alleged, were found on him. The woman gave evidence on Styles's behalf, and said she had the boots and skirt, the man never seeing them at all. The jury returned a verdict of "Guilty" and Styles was sentenced to two months imprisonment. **Annie Elizabeth Cole**, who, it was stated, had been before the court on twenty one previous occasions, pleaded guilty to the same charge, and was sentenced to eight months imprisonment.

17 18 July 1914

ALLEGED THEFT OF SUGAR AT WORCESTER At Worcester City Police Court yesterday, **Albert Robert Clarke**, boatman, Birmingham, was summoned for stealing, as servant, a sack containing 1cwt 3qr of sugar, value £2, the property of the Severn and Canal Carrying Company ; while John Jeynes, licensed victualler, of the Royal Oak Inn, Carden Street, was summoned for receiving the sugar. Mr Riley Pearson prosecuted. Mr W W A Tree defended Jeynes, and Mr T H Coombs appeared for Clarke. Mr Pearson said that Clarke started from Gloucester as captain of a boat, with a cargo of sugar, and he had to sign for the amount he took on board. Jeynes's house was not far from the canal in Worcester. Detective Handley and Mr Willis, the local agent for the company, saw Jeynes, and made inquiries. They were taken to a top attic, and there saw a bag of sugar. In a subsequent statement, Jeynes said that Clarke and another man went into the bar, and Clarke asked for a loan of 10s, saying they were hard up, and he had "a bag of something outside". Jeynes, Mr Pearson asserted, must have known that the bag was stolen. The Bench committed both men to the Quarter Sessions, bail being allowed.

18 15 August 1914

"GOING TO SHOOT THE GERMANS" At Atherstone yesterday, **Herbert Billingham**, boatman, West Bromwich, was charged with having been drunk while in charge of firearms. The police were informed that the prisoner was intoxicated with a loaded gun in his possession, and that he had been threatening one of the workmen at Hartshill quarries, where he had been at work loading a boat on the canal. When arrested he had a loaded gun and a quantity of ammunition in his possession, and he said he was "going to shoot the Germans". Prisoner was sentenced to fourteen days hard labour.

19 29 September 1914

DROWNED IN THE CANAL An inquest was also held touching the death of **Thomas Edward Smith** (52) of Devonshire Street, a boatman. According to the evidence, the deceased was steering a boat from Deepfields. Between King Edward Road and Summer Lane there were fifteen locks, and it was necessary for the deceased to leave the boat at each of these locks. At the ninth lock, which is under Newhall Street, the deceased was apparently getting into the boat when he fell into the water. He was recovered in an unconscious condition, and artificial respiration was resorted to, but without success.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

20 27 October 1914

WORCESTER QUARTER SESSIONS **Albert Robert Clarke** (51), boatman, was indicted for stealing 216 lb of sugar, the property of the Severn and Canal Carrying Company, while in the company's employment, and John Jeynes (38), licensed victualler, was charged with receiving the sugar.

Mr Riley Pearson prosecuted, and Clarke and Jeynes were defended by Mr Somerset and the Hon Mr Coventry respectively.

Edgar Mills, representative of the company, said that Clarke was employed as captain of a boat. Witness accompanied Detective Handley to Jeynes's public house. Jeynes took them up three flights of stairs where they saw the bag of sugar.

F B Thomas, Birmingham, gave evidence as to the delivery of 163 bags, and another bag came through the police, making the correct number expected.

Clarke, in evidence, said that he counted the bags and found there was one over. He left the bag at Jeynes's house, intending to take it back to the warehouse at Gloucester on his return. He was prevented from returning and taking it back.

He was found guilty and sentenced to six months hard labour. Jeynes was also found guilty with a recommendation to mercy, and was sentenced to six weeks hard labour.

21 23 February 1915

BIRMINGHAM BOATMAN'S THEFT OF COAL **Henry Young** (54), boatman, Hospital Street, Birmingham, was charged at Rushall yesterday with stealing coal, value 4s 6d, belonging to his employers, Messrs King Bros of Stourbridge, and Emily Longdon (26), married, Hall Lane, Walsall Wood, was summoned for receiving the coal knowing it to have been stolen.

Evidence was given by Police-constable Moore that he saw Young place a quantity of coal, which he had taken off a boat of which he was in charge, in the garden at the house where the woman lived. Mrs Longdon removed it. When the officer asked her for an explanation, she said she had given the boatman a shilling for the coal. She told the magistrates that her husband was an army reservist, and was at the front.

Young pleaded that he had been working on the canal for 45 years without a previous complaint. He was persuaded by the woman to give her the coal, as she told him her husband was at the war and she had no fuel in the house.

For the prosecution, it was stated that Young's conduct was aggravated by the fact that he was in receipt of a wage of £2 2s per week.

Young was fined £3, including costs, or a months imprisonment, and the woman was put on probation for three months.

22 1 March 1915

CHARGE OF BREAKING A CONSTABLE'S LEG **James Butlin** (32), boatman, 9 Belvedere Place, Great Francis Street, was remanded until Friday on a charge of inflicting grievous bodily harm upon Police-constable Granville Whitehead (135D). It was alleged that prisoner kicked the officer on the leg, breaking the shin bone. Butlin was arrested when running away by Police-constable Evans (201D), to whom he said he was "very sorry".

23 13 March 1915

BIRMINGHAM BOATMAN DROWNED An inquest was held at West Bromwich today respecting the death of **James Butler** (55), a boatman of 1 back 38 Grosvenor Street, West Ladywood, Birmingham, whose body was found in the canal at Greets Green on Tuesday.

It was stated that on Monday the man left Birmingham with an empty boat, intending to proceed to Cannock, but owing to the traffic he could not get through the locks at Greets Green, and he had to tie up. He went to a public house at night, leaving there about eight o'clock quite sober. On his way back to the boat he had to pass under a low bridge, and it is supposed that owing to the darkness he struck his head against the bridge and fell into the water. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

24 17 March 1915

A PERSHORE PRISONER IN GERMANY **Private Alfred Porter** of the Army Medical Corps, a native of Badsey near Evesham, who prior to the war was a boatman at Pershore, is a prisoner in Germany, having been captured early in the war. His wife has heard from him, stating he is going on very well, but asking her to send him every week bacon, cheese, butter cocoa, tea, sugar,

condensed milk and tobacco.

25 20 March 1915

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

A POLICE-CONSTABLE'S INJURIES **James Rowland Butlin** (35), 9 Belvedere Place, Great Frances Street ; **Ernest Henry Butlin**, 3 back 23 Cathcart Street ; and **Richard Jones**, 2 court, 3 house, Cardigan Street, boatmen, were charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm upon Police-constable Granville Whitehead by kicking him and breaking his leg. Mr Norris Foster prosecuted on the instruction of Mr J E Hill.

Police-constable Whitehead stated that at 10.50 on the night of February 26, he was on duty near the Ten Arches, Lichfield Road, Aston, when he saw Jones, who was drunk, being ejected from the Swan Pool Tavern. He was obstinate, and witness went to the landlord's assistance and helped to put the man out, after which he advised him to go home. Jones started to go up Holborn Hill, and all was quiet until closing time, when the Butlins came out of the public house. Directly afterwards, the three men commenced fighting. Witness told them to go away, and informed Jones that if he did not go he should lock him up, as he had had some trouble with him before that night. Jones replied, "Oh, you're the one who fetched me out of the boozer", and struck witness in the face. He closed with him and they fell, but witness got up and managed to get Jones on to his feet, and was arresting him when witness was kicked from behind in the ribs and on the right ankle. At that time there was a crowd round, and the officer could not say who kicked him.

He had to let Jones go, but caught hold of Rowland Butlin. Again he fell to the ground and this prisoner, and Jones and Henry Butlin attacked him. Rowland Butlin got away, and witness seized Jones again. Whilst he had this man under arrest, Rowland Butlin made a running kick at him, and fractured the bone just above the ankle. Witness fell to the ground in agony, and whilst he was on the floor he was kicked by several other men. He received a kick at the back of the head, and remembered a woman, whom he had since ascertained was named Mrs Linney, dashing through the crowd to his assistance. She tore his whistle away, and ran away blowing it. In the meantime the landlord of the public house and his son came to witness's assistance. He was afterwards taken to the hospital.

William Shotton, the landlord of the Swan Pool, and his son, spoke to going to the constable's assistance, and Mrs Linney also gave evidence. She said she ran through the crowd, unfastened the policeman's coat, and got his whistle and blew for assistance. "It's not the first time I've done it", added witness, "and it won't be the last".

Rowland Butlin said Police-constable Whitehead struck him first. He got up and returned the blow and knocked the officer down, but never kicked him.

Ernest Butlin said the constable, without any provocation, struck him with his left fist and Jones with his right, knocking them both down. When they got up, he told them to get along and then knocked witness's brother down. Jones also denied assaulting the officer.

Accused were all committed to the Sessions for trial, bail being allowed.

26 6 May 1915

BIRMINGHAM QUARTER SESSIONS

ANOTHER ASSAULT CHARGE **James Rowland Butlin** (32), boatman, **Ernest Henry Butlin** (34), boatman and **Richard Jones** (40), boatman, were charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm on Police-constable Whitehead on February 26. According to the opening statement by Mr Norris Foster, who prosecuted, the three men were the worse for drink, and when advised by the officer to go home, knocked him down and kicked him. As a result, his ankle was broken. The hearing was adjourned until this morning.

27 6 May 1915

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

ALLEGED THEFT BY CORPORATION EMPLOYEES Sidney Burrows, night watchman,

Joseph Smith and **Thomas Evans**, boatmen, all in the employ of the Birmingham Corporation, were charged with being concerned together in stealing two bags of horse corn, value 15s, the property of the Corporation, from Holliday Street Wharf on May 4th. **John College**, a boatman of Tardebigge, was charged with receiving the corn.

Detective Sergeant Strickland, in asking for a remand until Monday next, stated there had been systematic robbery of corn from this wharf.

The remand was granted.

28 7 May 1915

BIRMINGHAM QUARTER SESSIONS

BRUTAL ASSAULT ON A CONSTABLE The hearing was resumed of the charge of inflicting bodily harm upon Police-constable Whitehead, preferred against **James Roland Butlin** (32), boatman, **Ernest Henry Butlin** (34), boatman, and **Richard Jones** (40), boatman. Mr Norris Foster prosecuted and Mr Pritchett defended James Butlin. The prosecutor stated that on interposing in a quarrel between the men in Lichfield Road on February 26, they assaulted him, throwing him to the ground, James Butlin kicking and breaking his ankle. All the prisoners were the worse for drink.

Prisoners denied kicking the officer, and James Butlin accused the policeman of assaulting him and Jones.

Mr Pritchett admitted a common assault by James Butlin.

The jury found James Butlin guilty of the more serious offence, and the other two of common assault.

The Recorder, saying that these violent assaults on the police must be put a stop to, sentenced James Butlin to nine months imprisonment, and the other two each to four months, with hard labour.

29 27 May 1915

GAVE HIS LIFE FOR HIS DOG

BOATMAN DROWNED AT TIPTON The story of how a West Bromwich boatman sacrificed his life in attempting to save his dog was disclosed yesterday by the Tipton police. The man was **Edward Turley** (26), and he resided in Bromford Lane. He was proceeding to Walsall Wood Colliery for coal, accompanied by his nephew. When the boat was passing through Ryder's Lock, Tipton, Turley exclaimed, "The dog is in the cut!"

Directly afterwards, the nephew saw his uncle in the water at the bottom end of the lock, outside the gates, clinging to some ironwork with his right hand and holding a mongrel dog with his left. Suddenly he released hold of the ironwork and sank, and the dog swam to safety. When the body of the unfortunate man was recovered, life was extinct.

30 28 May 1915

HIS LIFE FOR HIS DOG

BOATMAN DROWNED AT TIPTON An inquest was held at Tipton yesterday on **Edward Hurley** (28), boatman.

Thomas Hurley, 143 Bromford Road, Oldbury, said on Tuesday morning he accompanied deceased, his uncle, who was taking an empty boat to Walsall Wood. At Ryder's Green he heard his uncle exclaim, "The dog's in". Witness went to the other end of the lock, and saw his uncle in the water holding the gate with his right hand and the dog with the other. He relaxed his hold of the gate, apparently to get a better grip, but he disappeared under the water and was drowned. The dog, which swam to safety, was not valuable.

The Deputy Coroner (Mr Checkley) said the unfortunate man sacrificed his life for a mongrel dog.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

31 11 June 1915

BOATMAN'S DRINKING BOUT At Brierley Hill yesterday, **James Higgins**, Tipton, was

summoned by his employers, Harris Bros, carriers, Brierley Hill, for £8 13s damages for neglect of work and for money overdrawn.

Mr Waldron, who prosecuted, stated that on April 7th Higgins, who was the captain of one of the works boats, took a quantity of bricks from Brierley Hill to London, and there received a consignment of 25 tons of lead required in the Midlands for munition purposes. On reaching Brentford on the return journey, he drew money from the firm's representative there and went on a drinking expedition. The result was that the boat remained idle at Brentford, and serious inconvenience and loss amounting to £6 was sustained by the firm.

The Bench ordered the defendant to pay the £8 13s claimed, and also £2 2s expenses.

32 14 June 1915

BOATMAN'S CHILD DROWNED IN CANAL A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned at an enquiry at Atherstone on Saturday into the death of a five year old girl named **Caroline Doughty**, daughter of a boatman, who was drowned in the Coventry Canal on Friday.

Inspector Spencer said although the father did what he thought was best to revive life in the child, he did not think the proper method was adopted. Brandy was administered. It was wrong to do this until breathing had been restored properly.

33 29 June 1915

MIDLAND QUARTER SESSIONS

WORCESTERSHIRE **John Lawrence** (25), a boatman, was sentenced to 15 months hard labour for the theft, at Hindlip near Worcester, of a jacket, hat and a pair of gloves, the property of Arthur Lunnon.

34 7 July 1915

BOATMAN FOUND DROWNED Near the aqueduct at Holly Hall, Dudley, there was discovered yesterday the body of **John Elwell** (47), Park Head, boatman employed by Messrs Cochrane and Co, Woodside Ironworks. He attended a supper at a public house at Hart's Hill on Saturday night, and left at about 9.45 to go home. As far as can be ascertained, this was the last time he was seen alive.

35 30 August 1915

CANAL LOCK FATALITY When travelling on a canal boat from Wolverhampton to Stourport, **Job Clark**, boatman of Kidderminster, missed his son **Thomas** while the boat was in Cotton's Lock at the latter town. A search was made for twenty minutes before the body was recovered, and attempts to resuscitate life were useless. At the inquest a verdict of "Accidentally drowned" was returned.

36 9 September 1915

At Lichfield, yesterday, **Joseph Pearsall**, boatman, Engine Street, Oldbury, was fined 10s for stealing 2 lb of growing potatoes, value twopence, from the Birmingham canal side at Lichfield.

37 15 September 1915

REFUSAL TO QUIT LICENSED PREMISES

SMETHWICK MAN CONVICTED At Oldbury Police Court yesterday, Thomas Morris, High Park Road, Smethwick, and William Brown, Bridge Street, Smethwick, were summoned for refusing to quit the licensed premises of the Whymsey Inn, Hales Owen Street, Oldbury. Morris was ordered to pay £2, or in default thirteen days imprisonment, and Brown £1, or three days.

Brown was further charged with assaulting **Benjamin Darby**, a boatman, Portway Road, Oldbury, on September 4. Prosecutor said he was passing the Whymsey Inn about 8.30 pm, when he saw the licensee with whom he was acquainted. The latter said he was going for the police because two men had refused to leave the premises. Brown came upon the scene, and witness advised him to go

home or there would be trouble. Brown struck him a blow in the face which knocked him to the ground. He was again knocked down when attempting to rise. Brown, who denied the charge, was fined 10s.

38 15 September 1915

MONEY IN A CANAL CABIN

A LOCK-KEEPER ROBBED At Tipton Police Court yesterday, Charles Sutton (25) and Susannah Preston (51), both of Hurst Street, Tipton, were charged with stealing £2 10s belonging to **George Jones**, Meadow Lane, Deepfields, lock-keeper.

Prosecutor said in the 13th inst, he placed his purse, containing two sovereigns and a half sovereign, in the cupboard of a cabin on the canal side, near the Factory Lock. Subsequently he saw the prisoners leave the cabin, and about five minutes later he missed the purse. He followed the prisoners and questioned them. Preston denied having the purse, and remarked, "If anybody has it, it is Sutton". The latter then exclaimed, "I will drown you if you say I have had it", and addressing witness, remarked, "Come with me to the cabin. She knows where it is". They all returned to the cabin, when Sutton took the purse from a rack near the cabin ceiling, but it was then empty.

Prisoners were each fined 40s, with the alternative of a months hard labour.

39 18 October 1915

LOCAL ROLL OF HONOUR **Private H S Baggott** (27), South Staffords, of Green Lane, Walsall, has been killed in action. He was a single man. Prior to the war he worked as a boatman.

40 2 November 1915

BOATMAN WHO COULD NOT SWIM An inquest was held at Walsall yesterday respecting the death of **William Wilcox** (30), boatman, Aston Street, Toll End, Tipton, who was drowned in the canal at Walsall on Saturday last.

Wilcox left home on Saturday with a younger brother, **George** (15), to fetch a boat load of coal from Walsall Wood Colliery. Near the Birmingham Road, Walsall, they had to pass through several locks, and the elder brother was seen in the act of closing a lock gate with a boat hook which, however, broke, causing him to fall into the water. George, who was at the horse's head at the time, on hearing the splash, ran back and saw his brother struggling in the canal. The boy stated that he called for help, but there was no one else in the immediate vicinity, and about ten minutes elapsed before another boat came along. The body was then recovered, and artificial respiration proved unavailing. Wilcox had worked on the canal from a boy, but had never learned to swim.

A verdict of "Accidentally drowned" was returned.

41 14 December 1915

Thomas Lowk, boatman, Sheepcote Street, Birmingham, was fined £3 10s 6d at Rushall yesterday for working a lame horse. It was stated that the animal's condition was so bad that it had to be slaughtered. Mr Paley (veterinary surgeon) said it was not often that a case of this kind was discovered, as these horses were usually kept out of the way on the canal side.

42 11 April 1916

BIRMINGHAM MOTOR LORRY FATALITY Mr Isaac Bradley (City Coroner) held an inquest at the Victoria Courts yesterday, concerning the death of **John Smith** (52), a canal boatman of 16 back 41 Walter Street, Nechells, who died as a result of injuries sustained through being knocked down by a motor lorry on Friday.

Evidence was given that the accident occurred at 9.45 pm at the corner of Walter Street and Thimblemill Lane. Neither the owner nor the driver of the lorry had yet been discovered.

The Coroner described the accident as one of the few due purely to the darkened condition of the streets. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

43 20 April 1916

INQUEST ON WEST BROMWICH CHILD

FATHER AND STEP MOTHER CENSURED The inquest was resumed at West Bromwich yesterday on the body of **Annie Sarah Teasdale**, aged four years and ten months, who lived with her father, a boatman, and her stepmother, at 65 Holloway Bank, Hill Top, the enquiry being adjourned to enable the stepmother, who was then ill, to attend.

The stepmother said the child fell downstairs and sustained injuries to her head. These were treated at home, and the child went about for some days, when she suddenly collapsed and died. She denied that there were any symptoms to show that the child was seriously ill. She also denied that she had systematically ill treated and neglected the child, though she had punished her because of her dirty habits.

A number of witnesses were called to give evidence as to the woman's treatment of the child. Mrs Teasdale, they said, had locked her step-children in the house while she went out. She had also beaten them, while neighbours had fed them.

According to the medical evidence, the child died from septic pneumonia and meningitis. She had an abscess on the forehead and several bruises on the head. The child was very thin, weighing only 22 1/2 lbs.

The Coroner said no doubt the child had been ill treated by the stepmother, and at the request of the jury, who returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, severely censured the father and stepmother. The latter, he said, had treated her step-children in a disgraceful way, and she would probably hear more about it.

44 10 May 1916

NEED FOR BOYS' LABOUR ON CANALS

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S OPPOSITION The case in which **George T Lemm**, a canal boatman, was summoned for failing to send his son, aged 11, regularly to school, was again before the Tipton magistrates yesterday. The boy had been kept from school to assist his father, who was engaged by Messrs W and S Foster, canal carriers, to convey sand to munition works.

Mr J H Stockdale (clerk to the District Council) said the Education Committee had laid the facts before the Board of Education, who had replied that the boy should not on any account be released from school for the purpose of industrial employment. The Board were of opinion that the employment of boys of 11 years of age was unnecessary unless for agricultural purposes where there were special circumstances, and the Board strongly deprecated the employment of boys of 11 years of age even in agricultural work.

Mr W A Foster, who represented the firm, stated that the latter had fourteen boats at present held up and 14 horses idle because of a shortage of labour. The managers of munition works were clamouring for the sand, and he contended that it was a matter of urgent national importance that it should be delivered. The boy, he pointed out, was nearly 12 years of age.

Captain Llewellyn, Local Government Board inspector of canal boats in peace time, said the railways were congested, and a large number of canal boats were laid up because of inability to get men to work them. He did not think the boy could be engaged in a more useful occupation.

The Bench imposed a fine of 10s, and expressed the opinion that the Board of Education should so relax their regulations as to enable boys to be employed in such occupations of national importance as that in which this lad was engaged.

45 12 May 1916

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

OWNER WANTED FOR BRASS RINGS **William Cottam** (39), boatman, no fixed abode, was charged with being in possession of a quantity of scrap brass supposed to have been stolen.

Police-constable Alfred Draisey met the man carrying a bag containing the metal on Key Hill shortly after seven o'clock on Wednesday night, and arrested him. The metal consists of flat rings similar to indicators for time fuses, and accused was remanded for a week in order that an owner

might be found.

46 19 May 1916

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

A BAG OF METAL **Thomas Cottam** (39), boatman, of no fixed abode, was charged with being unlawfully in possession of a quantity of metal supposed to have been stolen. Detective constable A Draisey said he saw the prisoner on Key Hill shortly after seven o'clock on the night of the 10th carrying a bag containing the metal. Prisoner said it belonged to his master, and took witness a fruitless journey of two miles to find him. A fine of 60s was imposed.

[note : name shown as [William Cottam](#) in previous article]

47 22 May 1916

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

NEGLECTING HIS FAMILY **George Ingles**, boatman, no fixed abode, was sent to prison for three months with hard labour for neglecting to maintain his wife and seven children, who had been chargeable to the Birmingham Union since December of last year, at a cost to the ratepayers of £64.

48 3 June 1916

BIRMINGHAM DROWNING CASES Two cases of death by drowning in the canal were investigated by the Birmingham Coroner in Birmingham yesterday. **Joseph Radford**, the eleven year old son of a boatman, fell into the canal near Summer Row unobserved, and was taken out dead from a lock in which the water was from 18ft to 20ft deep. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

The body of Thomas Kibble (38), a railway goods porter of 61 Hawkes Street, Small Heath, was recovered from the canal near Garrison Street at five o'clock on Thursday morning. According to the medical evidence, the body had been in the water three or four days.

Mrs Kibble said her husband had recently been ill with rheumatic fever. He was very depressed as the result of his illness, but had never threatened to take his life.

A verdict of "Found drowned" was returned.

49 22 June 1916

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

BOATMEN CHARGED WITH ASSAULT **William Bushell** (49), boatman, Canal Side, Fazeley Street, and his brother, **Stephen Bushell** (45), boatman, 3 Victoria Terrace, Westley Street, were charged with assaulting the police and inflicting grievous bodily harm upon Police-constable James Blackwell.

Police-constable Matthew Doyle said that in company with James Blackwell, a military police officer, he was on special duty on the canal side near Landor Street, on May 23, when the two prisoners, who were very much under the influence of drink, and two women came along. After some words, William Bushell struck him on the eye with his fist and kicked him. Stephen Bushell struck Blackwell, who had come to witness's assistance, a blow on the arm with a buckled belt, and also struck witness two or three blows on the head. Witness had to knock Stephen Bushell down twice, and eventually he was conveyed to the General Hospital and remained there until Saturday last.

Police-constable Albert George Endall said Stephen Bushell kicked him on the head.

Police-constable James Blackwell said the effect of the blow with the buckled belt was to fracture his right forearm.

Prisoners, who pleaded not guilty, were committed for trial at the Sessions, bail being allowed.

Sarah Bushell (43), wife of Stephen Bushell, charged with attempting to rescue her husband, was fined 15s.

50 4 November 1916

BIRMINGHAM MUNITIONS TRIBUNAL

A WARNING TO BOATMEN Professor Tillyard, chairman of the Birmingham Munitions Tribunal, at yesterday's sitting, uttered a warning to boatmen concerning neglect of work. A case had been heard against a boatman employed by an iron company, and the allegation against him was that he did not turn up on the Monday, and in consequence delay was caused in the removal of some metal to other works, and important munition work was thereby hindered.

The boatman admitted the offence. He said his brother had come home on furlough, and they went on the Sunday night to see a sister at Smethwick whose husband had been killed at the front. Owing to the darkness he lost his way, and was late in reaching home. He had been working till twelve o'clock on the Saturday night, and went to the wharf on Sunday.

The firm's representative asked the boatman if he went to the cabin to have some beer, but there was no answer.

The man said he worked 16 to 18 hours a day, and only saw his home about seven hours every week. His wages were about £3 a week, but most of that went in food, for with such long hours to work, a boatman needed a lot of food. (Laughter).

The Chairman said they found the boatman guilty of the offence complained of, but would give him a chance, as his conduct had previously been good. They would adjourn the case until after Christmas. Boatmen, however, had better take warning and not neglect their work, or they would be seriously dealt with. It was most important work for, as they had heard, some of the tram troubles in the city were due to the difficulty of getting fuel by boat.

51 6 December 1916

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

STOLEN SHELL CASES **William Alfred Hodgetts** (35), boatman, 5 back 78 Benacre Street, was charged with stealing 30lb of brass shell cases and an ingot of brass.

On the evening of the 29th November, Detective Williamson met prisoner in Suffolk Street carrying a bag containing something very heavy. Prisoner said it contained coal, but the officer, on examining the bag, found it contained shell cases. On searching prisoner's house, he discovered an ingot of brass. The metal formed part of a consignment by boat to a Birmingham firm that day.

Prisoner said he was taking the shells home as "curiosities" to show to his friends, and had no intention of stealing them.

The Stipendiary said it was a very serious case, and sentenced prisoner to six weeks imprisonment.

52 27 March 1917

DAMAGES AGAINST A CANAL BOATMAN At West Bromwich yesterday, **Thomas Hale sen** and **Thomas Hale jun**, boatmen, 168 Whitehall Road, were summoned by their employers, Field and Bradley, for neglect of work, £1 damages being claimed from each of them. Mr C H Darley, for plaintiffs, said they could not get the men to attend to their work on Mondays, but if defendants would promise to do so in future plaintiffs would be satisfied.

The elder defendant replied that he would work when he was fit.

Evidence was given that defendants failed to take their boat out on the night of March 11.

The elder defendant pleaded that he did not feel well enough to go, and his son could not go without him.

An order was made for the payment of the amount claimed, with costs.

53 10 April 1917

The body of a Wolverhampton boatman named **David Henry Littler** was found in the canal at Wednesfield Road yesterday. He resided at 22 Littles Lane, and was 58 years of age. The deceased was last seen on Sunday night.

54 20 April 1917

CONTRACTOR'S UNSUCCESSFUL CLAIM AGAINST BOATMAN

WORKMAN'S RIGHT TO LEAVE HIS EMPLOYMENT An interesting point under the Employers' and Workmen's Act occupied the attention of the Stafford magistrates yesterday, when **Edward Bodey**, a canal boatman of Canal Side, West Bromwich (.....) was sued by his former employer, William (.....) contractor of Forster Street, West (.....) £5 damages being claimed.

Plaintiff, a contract steerer for the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Co, said the terms of (.....) service were the same as those of railwaymen. Defendant was exempted from military service by the tribunal on condition that he remained in the same employment. Plaintiff contended therefore that the man could not leave. He understood defendant had been induced to leave to go elsewhere. Defendant gave him notice on Monday to leave the following Saturday, but witness refused to accept it.

Major Thompson (Chairman) said the (.....) exemption granted by tribunals were usually that a man should remain in the same employment, not necessarily in the same employ. In other words, a man was not bound to any employer.

Plaintiff said the £5 damage was made up by a large debit he had received from a railway company for demurrage, due to the defendant's neglect to carry out his duties.

Mr Dawes, for defendant, said plaintiff had a wrong idea as to the conditions of the man's employment. In ordinary times a day or even a voyage's notice was sufficient.

The Magistrates' Clerk (Mr B Shakespeare) said plaintiff could not hold the man to his service. There might be a question of his getting employment elsewhere, but that was a matter for another court.

The magistrates decided that they had to (.....) and dismissed the case.

55 14 May 1917

WORCESTER FATHER'S NEGLIGENCE At Worcester on Saturday, **Samuel Timmins**, boatman of Dolday, was sent to gaol for six months for neglecting his child, **Jellico Timmins**, aged two years.

Mr Tree, prosecuting for the RSPCC, said since April last prisoner had left his wife and child with no means of support, and the society had kept them till work was found for the woman.

Mrs Timmins said prisoner left her with 6d only, and another child was in Stourbridge Union.

Mrs Martha Jones, with whom prisoner was said to have left Worcester, was fined £1 for leaving her two children.

56 15 May 1917

THREW ROWLEY RAG INTO THE CANAL **Joseph Edwards**, boatman, Springfield, Rowley, was fined 20s at West Bromwich yesterday for throwing Rowley ragstone into the canal between Albion and Bromford. When the boat was re-gauged at the Bromford stop, it was found to be 1 ton 11 cwt short. Detective Inspector T Martin said the practice, which was a very common one, put the company to very considerable expense.

57 16 May 1917

BOATMAN CHARGED WITH SHOOTING A BOY At Oldbury yesterday, **Joseph Higgs** (16), living in a canal boat at Park Lane, Oldbury, was remanded in custody for a week on a charge of maliciously wounding Joseph Stanley (13) of 16 Salop Street, Brades Village, by shooting him with a rifle. It was stated that when arrested on Friday night, prisoner made a statement that as he was going along the canal Stanley and others threw stones at him. He fetched the gun out of the cabin and shot, without meaning to hit anyone. The injured boy, who received a wound in the temple, is in hospital in a serious condition.

58 12 June 1917

BIRMINGHAM POLICE COURT

ALLEGED THEFT OF CLOTH **Frederick Welch** (23), canal boatman, and Arthur Swinson (26),

no fixed abode, were committed to the Sessions for trial charged with being concerned together in stealing two bales of cloth, value £32, the property of Grainger and Smith (Limited), Carr's Lane. The evidence was that on May 14 Detectives Rawle and Blackwell saw Swinson move the cloth, which was in a passage, and Welch, who arrived with a handcart, moved one of the bales into the street. He was about to fetch the other when Blackwell made his appearance. Welch was chased and captured by Blackwell the same day, and Swinson was arrested four days later, at a public house in Hurst Street.

59 7 July 1917

BIRMINGHAM QUARTER SESSIONS

STEALING CLOTH **Frederick Welsh** (23), boatman, pleaded guilty and Arthur Swinson (26), turner, was found guilty on a charge of stealing two bales of cloth, value £30, belonging to Grainger and Smith, from a passage adjoining their premises in Carr's Lane. Welsh was given a bad character, but the police stated that hitherto Swinson had borne a good character. He had been rejected from the Army and had latterly been ill. Recently, however, he had been associating with bad companions, and had been led astray by Welsh.

Welsh was sentenced to six months imprisonment, and will be handed over to a military escort as a deserter on the completion of his sentence. Swinson was bound over to be of good behaviour for 12 months.

60 17 July 1917

LIGHTENING HIS LOAD **Joseph Hawkins**, boatman, Dale Street, Tipton, was at Rushall yesterday fined 10s 6d for depositing slack in the canal. It was stated that under pretence of getting water out of his boat, defendant shovelled a lot of slack overboard, and that boatmen were in the habit of lightening their loads in this way.

61 15 August 1917

FATHER CHARGED WITH MURDER OF HIS SON

WHAT A POTTERIES BOATMAN DISCOVERED At Burslem yesterday, a collier named Henry Eggleton (45) of Anchor Road, Longton, was charged with the wilful murder of his seven year old son, George Henry Eggleton, by drowning him in the canal at Trentham.

Mr J Higgs, superintendent of police at the Stone Division, in asking for the prisoner to be remanded in custody, said that after having a few words with his wife on Monday morning, the prisoner left the house about 11 am, taking the boy with him. He was next seen by a boatman named **Whittingham** about 3.30 pm on the canal side between Sideway and Trentham, about two miles from Stone. Whittingham became suspicious as to the manner in which the two were sitting on the edge of the towing path, and after shouting, stepped from his boat and approached the prisoner. In reply to a question the latter said he was ill. Whittingham then enquired, "What is that by your side?" and the prisoner replied, "It is my boy". The boatman then exclaimed, "Why, he is dead!" but Eggleton said, "No, he is not". Whittingham subsequently found the child to be dead, and went for Sergeant Brandrick, who took Eggleton into custody.

Sergeant Brandrick said prisoner told him the boy fell in the canal, and he (the prisoner) went in after him, but was some time in finding the body.

Prisoner said he would rather be remanded until Friday, and he will be brought up at Stoke on that day.

An inquest on the body of the child will be held this afternoon.

62 25 August 1917

THE TRAINING OF CANAL BOATMEN

WHAT IS DONE IN THE MIDLANDS It is estimated that between 500 and 600 canal boats are lying idle in the Midland area at the present time in consequence of the large number of boatmen who have entered the military service. Efforts are being made to equip the boats for reinstatement

in service and for that purpose navigators are being trained. In some districts the men are instructed in a body, but in the Midlands the practice is to put a third man into a boat and keep him there until he is sufficiently trained to take the place of the mate, who is then transferred to another boat as captain. This, it is said, is proving to be a satisfactory method, and more of the men are rapidly becoming experienced boatmen. At one time it was thought the place of a canal boatman could be filled by means of substitutes, but this was soon proved to be a mistake. Whilst no particular technical knowledge is required in the training of canal boatmen, certain qualities are necessary which an ordinary man does not generally possess. It is essential, for instance, that a boatman should know the construction of the boats of the canal he navigates, as well as the ins and outs and the turns of the stream, and that knowledge can only be obtained by experience. The men in training in this Midland district are being drawn from the Port and Transit Labour Battalion, and are selected with the greatest care as to their suitability. On the whole, they are showing wonderful adaptability. The more easily trained are those who have been watermen, and among those being brought into the Midlands are men with experience on the Mersey. Others have more to learn, but all are working with a will. It is estimated that at one time the number of canal boatmen was about 40% below pre war times, but the deficiency is being made good by the action at present being taken by the Government.

63 7 September 1917

MOTOR CYCLE THIEF CURLED INSIDE A FEATHER BED At Lichfield, **Arthur Howell** (34), boatman, Canal Side, Huddlesford, pleaded guilty to stealing a motor bicycle and sidecar, value £10, the property of Edward Lear, Freeford, Lichfield, on the 24th ult.

The machine was missed from a shed near the prosecutor's house, and a detective traced the wheel marks to the prisoner's house. Prisoner's wife said her husband was in Birmingham, but on going into an attic at the top of the house, the detective found a feather bed rolled up, and the prisoner was curled up inside it. He found that the bicycle had been taken to pieces, and the sidecar was covered over with nettles in a field at Freeford.

Prisoner said, "It's all right. I have done it to get locked up".

Prisoner was sentenced to six months imprisonment.

64 29 September 1917

DUDLEY SOLDIER'S SUICIDE IN LONDON

ANXIETY TO GO BACK TO FRANCE At Lambeth yesterday, a verdict of "Suicide whilst temporarily insane" was returned at an inquest on **Frank Guest** (40). Deceased was a canal boatman at Dudley, and though in a certified occupation, volunteered for the army. He was gassed and slightly wounded in France in July. On Wednesday morning, he was found with his throat cut by a razor in a lavatory at the 5th London General Hospital.

Colonel Herbert Hawkins, RAMC, said deceased had been at a convalescent home in Weybridge, and was sent to the hospital on Monday to be seen as to whether he was fit for discharge from the army. The matron at the home had, however, sent a letter to witness giving particulars about his being depressed and sleeping badly, and of his great anxiety to go back to France.

Mr Oddie (the coroner) : A very intelligent matron.

The witness added that the man never suggested suicide. He was very quiet and well behaved, but no doubt the air raids on Monday and Tuesday turned the scale against him.

The Coroner : Have you many cases of this kind?

Colonel Hawkins : We have had thousands of soldiers, but I only know of one similar case in three years.

65 29 September 1917

BRITISH SOLDIER'S TWO YEARS IN GERMANY

ENEMY'S INHUMAN TREATMENT OF THEIR PRISONERS Private Joseph Wild (23) of the Loyal North Lancashires, has arrived at the home of his mother, 16 Beech Crescent, Barrow in

Furness, after an absence of three years, about two years of which were spent in a German prisoner of war camp under conditions almost beyond human endurance. In the course of an interview, Private Wild related his experiences, which confirm many of the stories already reported of the terrible hardships and cruelty to which prisoners of war are subjected by the Germans. Private Wild belongs to Oldham, and was working in a textile factory there until May 1914, when he joined the 10th Manchester Territorials. On the outbreak of war he was transferred to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and went out to France in November 1914. On the 22nd of the following month he was taken prisoner at La Bassee, and sent to Lille. The railway journey on a slow train took two days, and for the first three days he and his comrades did not receive a morsel of food. "We were absolutely starving," he said. "The French people at Lille showed us great kindness, and tried to throw us cigarettes and chocolate, but the Germans pushed them back very roughly. We were at Lille two days, and were given some vegetable soup, but it was terribly sour, and the bread we got was black and nasty. We set off from Lille on Christmas morning at six o'clock, and after three day's journey reached the camp at Wittenberg, in Prussia. At one station on the way – Bitterfield – we stopped for refreshments, but we did not get any. The Sisters of Mercy came round with water in wooden buckets, but we had to break the ice before we could get a drink. Some of our men were fortunate to get a drink, but others had the water thrown in their faces by these so called Sisters or Red Cross nurses, some of whom even spat in our faces.

I could not have believed such conduct possible from women if I had not seen it. The German soldiers simply stood by and laughed at them, and the nurses seemed to do it to please them. Some of these Red Cross nurses treated the wounded worse than they treated the unwounded. We arrived at Wittenberg on the 28th December, and got a warm reception with bricks from the civilians and bayonets and swords from the soldiery. The majority of our men were wounded, and some of them were struck with bricks, others were injured by sharp bayonet thrusts, and the cowards even used the butt ends of their rifles on us. We did absolutely nothing to provoke such treatment.

CABBAGE BOILED IN VINEGAR There were about 150 of us altogether, including Northamptons, Suffolks and Loyal North Lancashires. We were put into a compound where there were some Highland Light Infantry, and they brought us food from the cookhouse, but it was so bad that we could not eat it. It was cabbage boiled in vinegar. We also got a loaf of vile bread between four men. Then we got into barracks and were there a fortnight, when typhus fever and spotted fever broke out. Men were dying in considerable numbers daily. The fever lasted nine months, and we never had a German near us all that time. We were isolated and had to do all we could for ourselves. I escaped the fever, but suffered from dysentery. We had five British doctors – a major, two captains and two lieutenants – who came to us towards the end of March. The major and three of the other doctors died from typhus. Captain Priestley and Captain Vadal survived, and are now in England. Captain Vadal got the Order of St John conferred on him for the fine work he did in stamping out the disease.

When the fever was finished, the Germans came round for working parties. The English would not go at first, and they used to put us in solitary confinement for seven or fourteen days for refusing. After that we went to work for 3d a day – ten hours a day – in the ironworks. We were treated shamefully, and had no food except for pieces of thick bread. In November 1915, the food parcels started coming from England, and that made things a little better. Plenty of our food parcels were confiscated, supposed to have gone bad. The camp life was terrible. The Russians were being tied up almost daily for doing nothing at all. They were strapped to a post with their hands tied above their heads. A brick was placed for them to stand on, and then kicked away when they were fastened, and so they were hanging by the wrists. There was also barbed wire on the post, so that if they wriggled they cut themselves. They did not do this with the English, but they used to set wolfdogs on us, and we used to jump on our beds to escape them. The Germans seemed to take great pleasure in these barbarities. Our men did not always take these things lying down, but they had to suffer for any effort at retaliation. On Christmas Day 1915, Private Holt, of the Loyal North Lancashires, received fifteen bayonet wounds and a sword wound because he threw two Germans on the barbed wire for setting dogs on him. He suffered shamefully, and it was not expected that he

would live, but he was still alive at Wittenberg when I left.

On August 15 1916, when in hospital, I saw the sight of my life. This was the blowing up of German munition works about two miles from camp. That was the second biggest ammunition factory in Germany, and there were 800 lives lost, including many women and girls. It was like an earthquake, and every window in our camp was shattered.

66 16 October 1917

PENALTIES AT WORCESTERSHIRE QUARTER SESSIONS **Joseph Higgs** (16), boatman, was found guilty of wounding Joseph Stanley at Oldbury with a gun, "but not maliciously", and the Chairman thereupon advised an acquittal.

67 1 November 1917

HUMANE SOCIETY AWARDS Testimonial on vellum to **Charles Curley**, boatman of 73 Rosary Road, Erdington.

68 15 November 1917

STAFFORDSHIRE ASSIZES

DANGEROUS COINER SENT TO PENAL SERVITUDE **William Gilbert** (68), boatman, pleaded guilty to having in his possession fifty counterfeit florins at West Bromwich on July 27.

Mr Farrant said detectives followed prisoner into a public house. He was asked to come outside. His pocket was tapped and he was asked what he had in it. On being searched, packets containing counterfeit coins were found. In answer to the charge, prisoner said he had found the packages. Subsequently, when his lodgings were searched, the police took possession of articles which were capable of being used in the making of counterfeit coins.

Previous convictions were proved against prisoner at Bridgnorth, Warwick and Birmingham, at the last named place he having been committed for eighteen months under the Coinage Offence Act on November 16 1912.

The Judge said it was evident prisoner was a dangerous coiner, his first conviction having been forty years ago. Whether he coined the florins or not, he had them in his possession, and other things were found at his lodgings. He sent prisoner to penal servitude for four years.

69 27 December 1917

A FATAL LUCKY BAG The death occurred at the Guest Hospital, Dudley, yesterday of **Annie Spicer**, the two year old daughter of **William Spicer**, boatman of Chapel Street. In the discharge of her household duties, Mrs Spicer removed the fireguard, and left deceased, who was then playing with a lucky bag, and another child aged eight years in the kitchen while she went to a tap at the rear of the house. During her absence the lucky bag caught fire, and the mother, hearing screams, went to the kitchen to find the child with her clothes on fire.

70 11 February 1918

ROWLEY BOATMAN DROWNED An inquest was held on Saturday at Brierley Hill relative to the death of **William Woodall** (25), a boatman of Doulton Road, Springfields, Rowley. Evidence was given that on Thursday evening deceased and another man were in charge of a boat at the Nine Locks, Brierley Hill. Whilst using a boat shaft to the side of the boat, the shaft broke and Woodall was precipitated into the canal and drowned. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

71 20 March 1918

NISI PRIUS COURT

WEST BROMWICH BOATMAN'S CLAIM **Ernest Talbot**, 8 back of 47 Bilhay Street, West Bromwich, claimed damages from the London and North Western Railway Company in respect of personal injuries received at the company's sidings at Albion, near West Bromwich.

Mr Hugo Young KC and Mr A Ward (instructed by Mr Duffell) were for plaintiff, and Mr C F

Vachell KC and Mr J G Hurst (instructed by Mr (...) of London, for the company.

Mr Hugo Young explained that plaintiff was a boatman in the employ of Robinson Brothers, tar distillers, West Bromwich. On the afternoon of June 11 last, he went to the part of the canal adjoining the sidings for the purpose of unloading benzol from the railway company's trucks into his boat. In consequence of the inflammable nature of the material handled, he showed two red flags on his barge, and it was also necessary to moor the boat carefully to the side. Originally there had been rings at the wharf through which to pass the chain from the boat. These had worn away, and had not been replaced, but, with the knowledge and permission of the railway officials, the boats were moored to the sleepers beneath the rails of the sidings. Plaintiff was engaged on the rails in thus fastening the boat, when without any warning, a truck which had been stationary was set in motion by other trucks running into it. One of the wheels passed on to his right arm, shattering the limb and rendering amputation necessary just below the elbow.

Previously as a boatman he had earned £3 5s a week, and he was now reduced to £1 8s as a night watchman.

Plaintiff alleged that normally six blasts would be blown before shunting operations were commenced, but no such warning was given.

Mr Vachell KC cross-examined witness with a view to showing that the method used to tie up the boat was unauthorised and forbidden, and, outlining the case for the defence, submitted that the customer was responsible for the security of the boats, and it was for him to provide the means for mooring them. Since the accident the railway company had given permission for this to be done. Warning was given, said Mr Vachell, when shunting operations were about to commence. The case was not concluded when the court adjourned.

72 17 April 1918

BOY CHARGED WITH ATTEMPTED SUICIDE Some remarkable admissions were made in a case heard at Walsall yesterday, in which a boy of 15 named **Samuel Wain**, of Green Lane, was charged with having attempted to commit suicide.

The evidence showed that on Thursday evening, a miner named Joseph Phipps was near Fishley Lane, Bloxwich, when he heard a gurgling noise and someone calling for help. He saw the boy Wain hanging from the bough of an elder bush with a cord around his neck. When released, he said he had been afraid of getting a "good hiding".

The boy's father, who is a canal boatman, admitted that because he found the lad "larking" with another boy after being told to look after the boat, he struck him with his whip, and threatened to thrash him if he did such a thing again. On being questioned by the Bench, the father and mother admitted that some days the lad had to work for fourteen hours at a stretch.

The Bench discharged the lad into the custody of his parents, but expressed disapproval of the long hours he had to work.

73 13 July 1918

BIRMINGHAM ASSIZES

BOUND OVER **Alfred Clark** (47), boatman, was bound over to come up for judgement when called upon for forging a canal ticket on February 27, issued by the Birmingham Canal Navigation Company. The reason of the alteration was that the men were penalised for carrying light loads.

74 10 August 1918

BOATMAN KILLED BY A HORSE A verdict of "Accidental death" was recorded at an inquest on **Thomas Clarke** (36) of 11 back of 78 Franchise Street, Perry Barr. He was a canal boatman, and was driving a horse on the canal side near Hay Mill on July 19, when his horse suddenly kicked him. The horse had previously been quiet, and one witness said it kicked out because of the torment of the flies, but Clarke himself told a man that the horse stopped to eat some grass, he struck it, and it kicked him. He was taken to the General Hospital, where he died on Tuesday as a result of peritonitis and perforation of the stomach following on the injuries.

75 21 August 1918

INQUEST ON VICTIM OF WORCESTER STEAMER ACCIDENT

JURY ADD RIDER TO THEIR VERDICT The Worcester City Coroner yesterday resumed the inquest concerning the death of Annie Elizabeth Stroud (21), munition worker, 139 Great Francis Street, Saltley, who was a passenger on the steamer *Princess Beatrice*, which met with an accident at Diglis Locks, Worcester, on August 9. The steamer was returning from Tewkesbury to Stourport, and on entering the lock, crashed into the lock gates, causing panic among the 120 passengers on board, during which deceased was drowned.

John Hood, George Street, Balsall Heath, a passenger on the boat, said that several times during the journey, the engineman went on deck to talk with the captain. At Diglis Locks, the steamer came practically to a standstill outside the lock gates, but on a signal being given, speed was put on and the steamer rushed straight into the top gates.

Walter Henry Birch, 4 St Nicholas Terrace, The Quay, Gloucester, the steersman, described giving successive orders within a few seconds to "go ahead slow", "go slow astern", "go half speed astern" and "go full speed astern", but the boat still kept going on and rushed right into the top gate. Mr Palmer remarked to him afterwards that he would see it did not occur again.

In answer to a juror, witness said he was a canal boatman by occupation. He had only steered steamers since Whitsuntide.

Police-constable Fisher (coroner's officer) said Palmer refused to give him any information on the night of the accident, and the following day at Stourport, Palmer said he was not in the engine room at the time of the accident.

The jury returned a verdict that deceased died from drowning, the rush of water into the steamer creating a panic among the passengers, owing to the failure of the steamer to come to a standstill in passing the lock gates, which was due to the engineer not reversing the engine in time, but there was no evidence of culpable negligence ; and added a rider to the effect that the jury viewed with grave concern the fact that persons holding no certificate of efficiency should have control of a passenger carrying steamer, and were of opinion that public safety demanded immediate action by the Board of Trade.

76 7 December 1918

NISI PRIUS COURT

ASSIZE SEQUEL TO CANAL TRAGEDY **Sarah Ann Woodall**, Long Lane, Black Heath, sought to recover from the Pearl Assurance Company (Limited), High Holborn, London, £625 in respect of a policy taken out by her late husband. Mr Disturnal KC said plaintiff claimed as administratrix of her deceased husband upon an accident insurance policy taken out by him with the defendant company on June 26 1911. The sum claimed was £625. Plaintiff's case was that her husband was accidentally drowned on February 7 last, while the policy was still subsisting, and that, therefore, she was entitled to the money. Defendants raised a number of defences, contending that at the time of his death, plaintiff's husband was not engaged in the occupation that he had stated on the assurance proposal he carried on, and that the condition as to the immediate notification of death was not fulfilled. In the proposal, Woodall described himself as a "haulier and contractor, master, working", and it was suggested by defendants that he increased the risk by becoming a boatman after the policy had been issued ; that death occurred while engaged in that occupation, and that they were not liable. The man's death took place while he was assisting to move a boat through a lock.

William Woodall, father of the deceased, stated that when the policy was taken out he and his son were in business together as hauliers and contractors, and owned a barge used for the conveyance of goods.

Cross-examined by Mr Vachell KC for the defendant company, witness admitted that when the war broke out his son wanted some employment which would protect him from the Army, and applied to the Rowley Regis Tribunal as "a skilled canal boatman". In another tribunal application, he described himself as a "canal boatman and horse drayman".

His Lordship announced that he would, if possible, deliver judgement on Monday morning.

77 10 December 1918

NISI PRIUS COURT

SEQUEL TO A DROWNING ACCIDENT His Lordship gave judgement in the case in which **Sarah Ann Woodall**, Long Lane, Black Heath, claimed £625 in respect of a policy taken out by her late husband with the Pearl Assurance Company (Limited), High Holborn, London. Plaintiff claimed as the administratrix of her late husband, who was accidentally drowned whilst an accident insurance policy taken out with the defendant company was subsisting. One defence set up by the company was that the husband, who was described in the policy as a “haulier and contractor, master, working” was not engaged at the time of his death in that occupation, but was a boatman, and that therefore the condition of the policy was not fulfilled, and that the risk had therefore increased.

His Lordship held that there was no material misdescription in the occupation, and pointed out that the word “contractor” was a very wide one indeed. There was no change of occupation. He therefore found for the plaintiff, but granted stay of execution.

78 18 December 1918

YOUTH WHO ROBBED HIS FATHER At Tipton Police Court, yesterday, a youth named **John Thomas Preston**, who was charged with stealing 20s and four packets of cigarettes, belonging to his father, **Abraham Preston**, boatman, Hurst Lane, not only protested his innocence but alleged that his brother **George** was the thief. He also alleged that his brother gave him 2s of the stolen money. The day the money and cigarettes were missed from the cabin of his father's boat, defendant went to Wolverhampton, and he admitted that the following night he slept in an old boat in a tunnel.

The magistrates put the boy on probation, but after this decision had been arrived at, Police-sergeant Richards stated that he had admitted to him that on three occasions he had attempted to obtain sums of £4 and over by means of forged documents.

Mr Mitchell (presiding magistrate), addressing the youth : You are evidently not so innocent as you look.