

WALSALL OBSERVER
1914 to 1929

1 7 February 1914

WALSALL POLICE COURT

FOUND COAL INSTEAD OF FOX TERRIER **Catherine Morgan** of 3 Little Bloxwich, who was said to be the wife of a boatman, was summoned for stealing 28 lb of coal, value 4d, the property of the Birmingham Canal Company, on January 22nd. PC Gibbs stated that owing to complaints, he concealed himself near Teece's Bridge, Little Bloxwich, and kept watch. At 8.10 he saw the defendant go on to the towing-path and later return carrying something, which proved to be a large piece of coal. She said she had found it in the field. Questioned by the defendant, witness denied that she told him that she had been looking for a fox terrier which had been lost. Defendant : Didn't you say there are a good many foxes about? (Laughter). The Deputy Clerk : You found the coal instead of a fox terrier. Defendant asserted that she did not go on the towing-path, and called a Mrs Stummuns, who deposed to seeing her come from the field. It was the woman's first appearance before the magistrates, and she was ordered to pay the costs.

2 14 February 1914

CANNOCK

LIGHT FREIGHTS At the Cannock Police Court on Monday, **George Pickett**, boatman, Dudley Road, Tipton, was charged with throwing slack into the Birmingham Canal at Rumer Hill, Cannock. **William Edward Harper**, clerk in the employ of the canal company, gave evidence, and defendant, who gave no explanation of his act, was ordered to pay 10s and costs (£1 4s 6d in all).

3 21 February 1914

WALSALL WOOD

A COAL THIEF'S STORY Summoned at the Rushall Police Court on Monday for stealing 36 lb worth of coal, the property of W H Bowater of the Soho Wharf, Birmingham, a well known character in Walsall Wood named John Watson (63) pleaded "guilty to a certain extent", and alleging that he was "driven from home", said hunger compelled him to commit the offence. Police-constable Moore spoke to seeing Watson in the early hours of the morning take some coal off a barge, which was lying at the side of the canal near the Lichfield Road. He had walked away about 30 yards, and when witness caught him, he said, "I have got to have some from somewhere for the fire, and this is the only way I have got to get it". A boatman named **George Williams**, who was asleep in the barge cabin at the time of the theft, said Watson had not been authorised to take any coal. Defendant, who admitted that he had appeared at the court before and done "small time for small crime", said he had worked in the pits for 52 years, and being unable to now follow his employment, was "cast into the road night and day". He stated that his relatives would not permit him to go home, and alleged that they had threatened him with pokers and knives, and told him he must clear away. "I have been burned to death twice in the pits near enough", he added, amid laughter, "and shot when they were blowing coal. For many and many a week I could not lift an empty spade in the mines. The doctor told me I shall carry chronic bronchitis to the grave". Police-constable Barrett stated that defendant's wife, who lived with her son-in-law, was a hard working woman, and went out charring, while Watson, on the other hand, would not work. All he did was to go fishing on the canal side in the summer. He often went home, upset the place, and his relatives could do nothing with him. The Bench decided to give Watson another chance by placing him on his good behaviour for three months.

4 18 April 1914

BIRCHILLS CANAL TRAGEDY

HUSBAND'S ILLNESS PREYS ON WOMAN'S MIND A pathetic story was told to the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) yesterday afternoon, when an inquest was held at the Guildhall

respecting the death of Polly Webster (50), wife of a forge engine driver of Rowland Street. Joseph Kimberley, nephew, stated that he and his wife lived with their uncle and aunt (Mr and Mrs Webster). During the last fortnight, the latter had been very peculiar, and her condition had been caused by the fact that her husband had been lying ill in bed for twelve months, suffering from cancer. He was regarded as incurable. On Tuesday night she sat in the kitchen with her head in her hands and seemed very depressed. When witness got up at 6.45 on Wednesday morning, his uncle called him and asked him to see if his aunt was on the couch. She was not there, and he missed her shawl and hat. His uncle told him that when he woke up at 3 o'clock his wife was sitting up in bed gazing at him, and he last saw her between 4 and 5 o'clock. At 7.30, witness heard that a body of a woman had been recovered from the canal, and he identified it at the mortuary as his aunt.

William Castle, lock-keeper, stated that at 6.30 am on Wednesday morning, his attention was called by a boatman to a body floating in the water. With assistance he got it on to the towing-path. Artificial respiration was resorted to, but without avail.

Police-sergeant Shepard (coroner's officer) spoke to interviewing Mr Webster, who said he and his wife had lived very happily together. During Tuesday night she slept very little owing to pains in the head. On one occasion when she woke, she remarked, "Albert, this is too much for me to bear, to see you lying here suffering". When he woke at 5.30 she was missing.

A verdict of "Suicide while temporarily insane" was returned, and sympathy was expressed with the relatives.

5 25 April 1914

WALSALL POLICE COURT

THIEVES' HANDCART BREAKS DOWN Harry Degville (21), miner, 4 Regent Street ; **Joseph Morton** (21), boatman, 36 Day Street ; and William Paddock (21), ironworker, 67 Farrington Street, were charged with stealing 10 cwt of pig iron, value 26s, the property of the Birchills Furnaces Ltd, on Wednesday. Mr Munnock, works manager, identified the iron, and Benjamin Hood, 78 Blue Lane, stated that on Wednesday Degville and Paddock came to his place and asked for the hire of a handcart, in order to fetch some wood. Later on he received information that the handcart had broken down and been abandoned in Green Lane. John Hooley, 30 Lower Rushall Street, gave evidence that on Wednesday night he was standing outside Thomas's Forge, Green Lane, when he saw the prisoners pushing a handcart, containing pig iron covered with slack. The handcart broke down, and the men ran away and left it. Detective-sergeant Burrell stated that the previous night Degville surrendered himself at the police station, and he subsequently arrested the other two. When charged with the offence, they all made replies to the effect that they went bathing and found the iron in the canal. They had no previous intention of taking it. The prisoners were each fined 20s and costs, or fourteen days' imprisonment in default.

6 2 May 1914

BLOXWICH

DROWNED IN THE LOCK Mr W Morgan (coroner) held an inquiry at the Board Room, Cannock, on Tuesday, respecting the death of **Joseph John Lowndes** (56), a boatman of Leamore, Bloxwich, who fell into the canal on April 25th at the Churchbridge Locks, Birmingham Canal, Leacroft, Cannock, and whose death occurred the same night in the Workhouse Infirmary, Cannock. Thomas Edward Lowndes, son of deceased, said his father left home in his usual health on the 23rd inst, to take a boatload of stone to Radford. By Mr Lichfield Meek : His father was a steady sober man, and had been a boatman all his life. **John Moore**, 37 Hatherton Lane, Leamore, Bloxwich, said he and deceased had worked the boat from Bloxwich to Radford, and were on the return journey. He saw deceased's cap in the water and ran to see where he was. Afterwards he got deceased out of the water, and the police were sent for. Witness tried to bring deceased round, but he was unconscious from being stunned by falling against the boat. Dr Butter said death was due to shock by immersion. If deceased had not been stunned, he might have recovered. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

7 9 May 1914

PELSALL

CANAL HEROISM A canal boatman – **Arthur Fletcher** of Wood House canal stop, Pelsall – is now the proud possessor of a Royal Humane certificate for gallantly saving life. A man of some 23 years and medium height, he modestly told an *Observer* representative on Monday evening how he rescued an eleven year old girl who had fallen into the canal near the junction bridge at Catshill, between Walsall Wood and Brownhills. “Me and my mate”, he said, “were working a boat on the canal at Brownhills on Pancake Day, and when I was leading the horse along the towing-path I noticed some little girls playing about by the junction bridge. I had gone with the horse about 150 yards further on when I heard the children screaming, and looking back saw a little girl bobbing up and down in the water. Then I ran to the bridge, jumped into the water, and managed to catch hold of the girl's wrist and get her to the side. She seemed to be unconscious, but after I had worked her arms, she came round and was carried home”. Although Mr Fletcher was, to use his own words, “born and bred round the canal” and has been working the barges ever since he left school (with the exception of three months spent in the Navy), he confessed that he could not swim. “Mind you”, he added, “I think I can do a dog paddle, but not properly swim”. The canal at the junction bridge he said was about 19 feet wide, and “where I jumped in I afterwards tested the depth with the tiller, and found it was about six foot”. Asked if he had any difficulty in rescuing the girl, Fletcher said she did not struggle, and added, “When I got into the water, I managed to grasp with one hand an iron casting in the brickwork of the bridge hole, and with the other hand I caught the girl's wrist. If I hadn't held on to that casting, I might never have got out myself, but I was able to pull the girl to the side and shouldered her up on to the towing-path”. Fletcher comes from a family for many years engaged in canal work. Born at Clayhanger, his father was a steerer, while his brothers also earn their living working the barges. Before marrying and going to Pelsall, Fletcher lived with his parents at Daw End Lane, Rushall. He also told our representative that on separate occasions some years ago, two of his brothers fell into deep water of the canal, but he managed to pull them out with the aid of a boat hook without getting into the water himself. The Royal Humane Certificate was publicly presented to Mr Fletcher at the Walsall Wood Institute on Monday evening by the Rev W W Boulton, vicar of Walsall Wood. Mr T Grindley (a member of the Brownhills Urban District Council), who has taken a great interest in securing for Fletcher the certificate, detailed the circumstances of the rescue, and explained that Fletcher ran a distance of 150 yards, and without divesting himself of any clothing, plunged straight into the water. The rescued girl, he said, is Lily May Harris (11), who lives with her parents at Lindon Road, Walsall Wood. When Fletcher brought her to the bank, he resorted to artificial respiration methods, and was assisted by a man named Isaac Heath. “When the facts of the rescue came to my knowledge”, added Mr Grindley, “I thought it my duty to do something in the matter. I explained the circumstances to the Vicar, who very kindly got into communication with the Society in London, and this certificate is the result”. (Applause). The Rev W W Boulton said Mr Fletcher had shown himself to be a truly brave man, and in that framed certificate he possessed something to be proud of for the rest of his life – a certificate which should encourage him if danger arose in the future. There were two kinds of bravery – physical and moral. They often found instances of physical bravery, but what about the moral – the daring to do right against all comers whatever the consequences might be. A soldier could be a bold brave fellow, knowing no fear when he faced the cannon's mouth, yet morally he might shrink back in a cowardly way and be tempted to do the wrong thing simply because someone laughed at the right. Physical bravery was a very grand and noble thing, but they must never forget that moral bravery was something better still. After all it was no joke to get into one of our innocent looking canals. Mr Fletcher had actually risked his life in rescuing the girl, and they all admired him for his brave act. He did not say it boastfully, but he thought no person had greater admiration for true bravery than the average Englishman - (hear, hear) – and they desired to express appreciation of their friend's pluck. The vicar of Walsall Wood also took the opportunity to congratulate Mr Grindley on his election as a member of the Brownhills Council, adding that “perhaps in a short while we shall hear that Brownhills and Walsall Wood are to be provided with a good bath, where young fellows can

learn to swim without getting into the muddy water of the canal". The rev gentleman mentioned that in his younger days he greatly enjoyed swimming, and expressed the opinion that it would be well if all had some knowledge of the methods of artificial respiration. The framed certificate was then handed to Mr Fletcher amid applause, the recipient remarking, "I don't think I should be doing my duty if I sat down without thanking Mr Grindley and the Rev Mr Boulton for their efforts on my behalf, and also thank the friends for coming here", Mr Fletcher's mother and wife were both present, and the former lady also expressed thanks. The Vicar remarked that they owed a debt of gratitude to Mr Grindley, adding, "He has carried out the real work, and I have simply had to write a few letters". Mr Grindley returned thanks, and proposed a vote of thanks to the Vicar and Mr S Cotton, who occupied the chair. Inspector Needham (of Rushall), seconding, said Mr Fletcher was a credit to Rushall and the district, and they all felt proud of him because of his noble act. In addition to Inspector Needham, several other police officers were present, including Police-sergeant Lewis and Police-constables Barrett and Moore.

8 11 July 1914

WALSALL POLICE COURT

COAL FROM THE CANAL Samuel Ganderton and Mary Jane Ganderton, husband and wife, 31 Goscote, were summoned for stealing 90 lb of coal, the property of the Birmingham Canal Co. Police-constable W Smith said that at 12.45 pm on the 19th inst, he was on duty close to the Goscote Works Bridge with Police-constable Wilkes, when he saw the male defendant throwing coal from the canal on to the towing-path. Defendants' son gathered the coal together and placed it under a hedge, and the woman helped to remove it. Police-constable Wilkes gave corroborative evidence, and in cross-examination both witnesses were positive as to the identification of the parties. Defendants denied the offence, and Samuel Ganderton alleged that it was another man who was in the water, adding that he himself was under the doctor's care. Police-constable Wilkes said that he had the male defendant under observation for quite 15 minutes. He followed him along the canal side after he had come out of the canal, and saw him dress. In reply to the assistant magistrates' clerk (Mr Muncaster), Ganderton said he could not produce evidence to prove the truth of his statement. The case against the male defendant was adjourned for three months, and the woman, against whom there was a previous conviction, was fined 1s and costs. Alice Plant of Blower Street, Heath End, Pelsall, was summoned for stealing 56 lb of coal, value 4d, the property of the Birmingham Canal Co, on June 20th. Police-constable Smith said that at 7.20 pm he was on duty close to the Goscote Hall Bridge, when he saw defendant standing on the canal bridge with a baby in her arms. He watched her for some minutes, and saw her go to a boy aged nine, and hand the baby to him. She then went to the canal side and carried off several pieces of coal, one weighing about 1/4 cwt, which she put into a two wheel cart and started the lad off with it. Defendant, who pleaded guilty, said she did not think she was doing any harm, and alleged that a boatman asked her if she wanted a lump of coal. She also stated that it was the first time she had done anything of the sort in her life. Defendant was ordered to pay 5s towards the costs.

9 1 August 1914

COMPENSATION FOR A BOATMAN'S WIDOW At Walsall County Court on Wednesday, Mr Meek, solicitor, applied for the distribution of £207 paid into court on behalf of **Charlotte Lowndes**, Providence Lane, Leamore, in respect of the death of her husband, who was a boatman employed by his cousin, Joseph Lowndes, the latter being a contractor to the Cannock Rural Council. It was stated that the woman's husband was crushed by his boat whilst passing through a lock. An order was made for payment out of court of £30, and the balance at the rate of 15s a week.

10 1 August 1914

PELSALL

CANAL HORSE "A BAG OF BONES" "The animal was nothing but a bag of bones", said a police officer at Rushall court on Monday when giving evidence against **George Cresswell** (47), a

boatman of Lower Ault Street, Spon Lane, West Bromwich, who was summoned for cruelty to a mare, and **Isaac Fern** (58), master boatman and owner of the animal, of Rabone Street, Smethwick, who was summoned for permitting the mare to be worked while in an unfit state. Mr H A Tucker, who prosecuted for the Walsall Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, stated that about 4.30 on the afternoon of Monday week, Police-constable Pass was told that a horse had fallen on the canal tows-path at Pelsall, and on going there found the animal lying on the ground with a wound across the knee and unable to rise. There was no doubt this wound was the result of the horse's fall. However, there were other wounds which were evidently causing pain, and the animal was in such an impoverished and emaciated condition that the constable formed the opinion that it was unfit for work. Mr A E Paley (veterinary surgeon, Walsall) was sent for, and so impressed was he with the poor condition of the horse – which, he would tell the Bench, was almost a skeleton – that, on the driver agreeing, he destroyed it. Mr Tucker submitted that the defendant Fern saw the condition of the horse before it set out on the 27 mile journey from Smethwick to Brownhills, and for that reason a summons had been issued against him. Police-constable Pass said the animal was “nothing but a bag of bones”. Cresswell told him that he started from Smethwick with the horse and empty boat on Sunday midnight to go to Brownhills Colliery, and was returning with a load of 28 tons when the mare fell down. “She seemed to lose all self control”, Cresswell had told witness, “and went head over heels”. Police-constable Rushton stated that the driver went to Pelsall Police Station and reported that the horse was down. When witness suggested that a vet should be called, Cresswell said the horse was not worth it. However, when Mr Paley recommended that the horse should be destroyed, Cresswell agreed that was the best thing that could be done. Abraham James, inspector in the employ of the prosecuting society, spoke to interviewing Fern regarding the matter, when the owner admitted that the horse had fallen down in the stable. If there were any sores, he said the harness had been padded. The veterinary surgeon (Mr A E Paley) stated that the injury on the animal's knee laid bare the bone, while there were several wounds of old standing, one on the off shoulder being about the size of a crown piece. The animal was in such a weak and impoverished condition – evidently the result either of overwork or lack of proper diet – that she was totally unfit for work, and it was a matter of wonder how she did such a journey. Witness believed it was cruelty to walk the mare, let alone work her. As the animal was incurable, he destroyed her. The condition of the mare would certainly be palpable to a person knowing anything about horses. As to the horse not having been properly fed, Fern handed a bundle of papers to the magistrates which he intimated were receipts for fodder purchased. Mr W L Lewis (magistrates' clerk) said this was no proof that this mare had received the food. The mare, said Fern, “needed neither whip nor stick”, and he was not aware that she was suffering from any wounds. He bought her eight months ago for £8, and although he had kept horses for forty years, he had never had any complaint of this sort against him before. The Bench considered that the animal was totally unfit to be worked, and Mr W H Brookes (who was accompanied on the Bench by Mr S Bonner), addressing Fern, said, “Your own character is not very good, and you will be fined 2s and 14s 6d costs, and have to pay one guinea vets fee”. The driver, Cresswell, was fined 10s and 8s 6d costs.

11 8 August 1914

CANAL DANGERS

CORONER ON SAFEGUARDING THE PUBLIC

JURY'S RECOMMENDATION TO BIRMINGHAM NAVIGATIONS – Shortly after daybreak on Sunday, the body of an old age pensioner, William Smith (81), formerly a miner, was recovered from the canal at the back of Dalkeith Street, where he had lived.

At the inquest conducted at the Guildhall on Tuesday afternoon by the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison), George Henry Smith (a son) stated that his father had been very feeble, and suffered from defective eyesight. On Saturday night the old man left home to fetch some whisky because his wife was ill, and he then seemed as cheerful as usual. For some time, the old man had attended the Boatman's Rest Mission, but witness had never known him to be on the canal side.

Arthur Peakman of Chapel Street stated that when on the tows-path at 4.10 on Saturday morning,

he saw the body of an old man lying face downwards on a mud bank in the middle of the canal. The water was then being drawn off. Witness called a policeman, and together they waded out and brought the body to the side.

William Castle, a lock-keeper employed by the Birmingham Canal Navigations, stated that he knew the old man well. From six o'clock onwards on Saturday night witness was on duty on this portion of the canal side while the water was being drawn off, but never saw the old man walking about. A walking stick, which witness recognised as belonging to the deceased, was found in a "pound" higher up to where the body was recovered, so that it was quite possible that with the rush of water the body was swilled through the paddle holes of the lock to a lower level.

Closely questioned by the Coroner, the lock-keeper said it was part of his duty to keep people from trespassing on the canal side, but admitted there were several ways by which they could obtain access to the towing-path.

The Coroner : How do you carry out your duty then?

Witness : I make the best of it.

Castle, further questioned, said he locked the gate near the Birchills top lock at 6 o'clock on Saturday night, and gave instructions that it should be kept fastened, but he admitted that there were other people who possessed keys. Another opening on to the towing-path at the back of Dalkeith Street was by a coal yard, and he admitted that there was nothing to stop people going from the street through the coal yard to the canal side. For this access to the towing-path, he believed the coal people paid rent to the Canal Company. Lower down the canal side, there was a broken down wall at the back of some houses, and this he admitted was another means by which people could get on to the towing-path. The wall had been in such a condition for about four months, and although he had complained about it, nothing had been done.

The Coroner : Doesn't it amount to this, that what you call part of your duty is a mere nothing, and nobody expects you to carry it out?

Witness : The Canal Company do.

The Coroner said several deaths had occurred through people wandering on to the canal side by accident either during fog or darkness, and within the last few years Coroners' juries had several times made representations to the Canal Company about maintaining the privacy of the canal and safeguarding the public. "Have you ever had special instructions from headquarters concerning this?", Mr Addison asked.

Witness : Yes, to obtain the names and addresses of persons trespassing.

The Coroner : But to do nothing to keep them out?

Witness : There are warning notices posted in various places.

The Coroner : Which it is impossible to read in the dark. Have you made complaints to your superior officers about the trouble you have with people trespassing on the canal side?

Witness : No.

Mr Addison : I think it is very probable complaints will be made by somebody else.

Police-constable Bates said that whenever the canal was emptied for cleaning purposes, there was always a rush of people to gather coal from the bottom, and it was at the request of the Canal Company that he was on duty on the towing-path from 10 o'clock on Saturday night till six the next morning to prevent trespass and coal stealing. The hurdles on the Green Lane side of the canal had been twisted and bent by people getting through, and witness believed that nothing but a ten foot wall would stop them, and then it would have to be spiked. Witness knew it was possible to obtain a passage from Dalkeith Street through the coal yard. When the body was recovered, there were found in the pockets a bottle of whisky, three shillings, some boot laces and a necktie.

Summing up, the Coroner said there was nothing to suggest that the old man committed suicide. If the jury considered there had been any dereliction of duty on the part of the Canal Company in not properly safeguarding the public, then it was their duty to say so.

After a consultation in private, the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental drowning", and recommended that representations be made to the Canal Company that something be done to prevent public access to the canal side.

A vote of sympathy with the relatives of the deceased was also passed.

12 15 August 1914

ALDRIDGE

TOOK RAFTERS FROM DESERTED COTTAGE A boatman named **John Mellors** (41) of Shadwell Street, Birmingham, appeared at the Rushall Police Court on Monday, summoned for stealing three wooden rafters, value 1s, belonging to the Aldridge Colliery Co. Police-constable Ashley stated that while in Dumblederry Lane, Aldridge, at 8.15 on the night of the 29th ult, he saw Mellors, who was in charge of a horse and canal boat, take rafters from a disused building adjoining the towing-path, and throw them on the barge. When witness spoke to him about it, he said he didn't think they were much use, and did not know he was doing any harm. Mr H H Jackson (Walsall), for the defence, stated that Mellors had worked for one firm for 15 years, and his employers would give him a very excellent character. The house from which the rafters were taken was an old tumbled down and deserted place. Six or seven boys were playing round about it when defendant passed with the boat, and they shouted, "Do you want a bit of wood?" Mellors did not think he was doing harm by taking it, and considering he was locked up throughout one night, Mr Jackson submitted that defendant had been punished for his indiscretion. As this was the first time Mellors had been in trouble, the Bench adjourned the case against him for three months.

13 3 October 1914

WALSALL POLICE COURT

BOATMAN AND HIS WIFE **Thomas Edwin Lowndes**, boatman, 15 Providence Lane, was summoned for deserting **Celia Lowndes**, 38 Cornwall Street, his wife, and Celia Lowndes was cross summoned by her husband, who alleged that she was a habitual drunkard, and asked for a separation order. The case was an adjourned one. Mrs Lowndes complained that her husband had not been sending money for her maintenance since the adjournment. The Bench decided to grant a further adjournment for a fortnight, for the husband to attend court.

14 12 December 1914

PELSALL

RAKING THE CANAL FOR COAL Caught by a policeman raking the bed of the canal at the back of her house in Highbridge Road, Pelsall, a married woman named Mary Ann Turner (53) was summoned at the Rushall Police Court on Monday for stealing 1/2 cwt of coal, the property of the Birmingham Canal Company, value 6d, on the 21st of last month. Police-constable Rushton said he saw Turner standing on the towing-path raking in the water. Noticing him approaching, she ran away, but he caught her, and when asked how she accounted for stealing the coal, she said, "I haven't got much". Beside her was a bag containing about half a hundredweight. **Thomas Martin**, Detective Inspector in the employ of the canal navigators, stated that the company claimed as their property all coal in the canal, and had posted notices warning persons against taking it. When he interviewed defendant, she admitted having raked the water for the coal. There had lately been various complaints about coal being taken from the canal in this district. Defendant said she was feeding fowl when a boatman on a passing barge shouted, "Mother, here's a bit of coal", and threw a lump into the water. "I didn't ask him for it", she added, "and if I hadn't got it out, someone else would". She was fined 5s and £1 2s costs.

15 2 January 1915

DRINK TRAGEDIES

SORDID STORIES FROM THE CORONER'S COURT At each of two inquests conducted by the Deputy Borough Coroner (Mr F Cooper) at the Guildhall on Monday afternoon, it was found that death was the result of excessive drinking.

The first inquest had reference to the death of **Mary Ann Skidmore** (38), the wife of a canal boatman living at 99 Dalkeith Street. The woman died in the Workhouse Infirmary.

The husband, **John Skidmore**, said his wife had been ill for three or four years.

The Deputy Coroner : Do you know what caused her ill health?

Witness : Yes ; liquors. The man added that he had tried to stop his wife drinking, but he was not always at home to watch her. He admitted that he had given her his wages, but said that if he had not done so his wife would have procured drink from somewhere. Dr Layton had attended her, and prior to her removal to the Infirmary, she had kept her bed for six weeks. She had been drinking the whole of the time.

Mr Cooper : It is said she was in a filthy condition.

Witness : I know nothing about that.

Ruth Bullingham, widow of 108 Dalkeith Street, said she had known Mrs Skidmore from childhood, and she had been drinking heavily during the last few years.

Questioned as to the husband's conduct towards deceased, witness replied, "He's been a good 'un. He's been too good to her, fetching stuff for her. I shouldn't have fetched it".

The Deputy Coroner : Has she been getting out of bed during the last six weeks?

Witness : Only when "Old Nick" was in her. Mrs Bullingham added that the woman refused to be attended to, and her dirty condition was not due to lack of care on the part of the husband or daughter (a girl of seventeen).

Dr G M Fox (Workhouse Medical Officer) said he saw the woman after her admission to the Infirmary, and she was then in an unconscious condition and dying. She had obviously lacked proper nursing attention. Death was due to cerebral thrombosis, the result of excessive drinking.

Dr F G Layton said he had attended the woman at various times, always for the same thing – drink. About three weeks ago, when he saw her, she showed general evidence of alcoholic neuritis, and on the previous Tuesday she was so much worse that he ordered her removal to the Infirmary. Brain trouble had followed, the woman being only semi conscious and partly paralysed.

The jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, and expressed the opinion that the husband had done his best for the woman.

[The second article is about Thomas Kelly, miner, who drank a pint of rum in a night!]

16 9 January 1915

WALSALL POLICE COURT

NEGLECT OF WORK James Clarke, 6 Russell's Yard, Blue Lane, was summoned by his employer, Oscar Johnson, coal merchant, Wisemore House, who claimed 9s damages for alleged neglect of work. The claimant said the man had been employed by him as a boatman. He should have worked on December 29th, but, after waiting for him on the canal side for several hours, his mate informed him that he had not turned up. He had not been at work since. At the present time he (witness) was working under contract for the Walsall Electricity Department, drawing slack down by boat, and through defendant not working, a load had to be put back to the reserve stock, causing extra haulage. The defendant did not appear, and an order was made for payment forthwith.

17 16 January 1915

CANAL DROWNING TRAGEDY

LEAMORE WOMAN WORRIED OVER HER SON During the dinner hour on Monday, there was recovered from the canal at Bloxwich the body of a woman named Keziah Beeston (65), wife of Edward Beeston, a blacksmith of 85 Hatherton Lane, Leamore, and at the inquest, conducted on Monday night by the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the Bloxwich Police Station,

The widower said he and his wife had been married forty two years, and for some time she had suffered from bronchitis and been in delicate health. She had also fretted over a son who was mentally afflicted, and had told witness several times when excited that she was tired of her life. She had also worried over the son not taking his proper meals. On Saturday night, the son "acted awkward", and became so violent that witness was obliged to leave the house and complain to the police. This troubled deceased a good deal, and she was also upset concerning her daughter, who was going into service, On Sunday evening there was some talk about a box which the son had

promised to lend to his sister. However no angry word was spoken. Some time after the son had gone to bed, deceased went out about 8.30 with a shawl on her head. Throughout the day she had appeared as cheerful as usual, but when she left home she seemed worried.

The Coroner : Did you ask her what was worrying her?

Witness : No ; I knew her troubles to a nicety.

When she did not return, inquiries were made, and in the early hours of the morning witness reported her disappearance to the police.

Mary Linnell, wife of Joseph Linnell, a boatbuilder of Hatherton Lane, said that, although naturally a cheerful woman, Mrs Beeston had latterly been troubled a great deal over her son. She had also told witness she did not want her daughter to go to service.

Police-constable Wilkes spoke to seeing the body floating in the canal at the back of Lambert's works in Green Lane, Bloxwich, and with the assistance of a boatman recovered it from the water.

Keziah Beeston (22), the daughter, also stated that her mother had been greatly worried – especially last week – over the son.

Dr Drabble spoke to examining the body at the mortuary and finding everything consistent with death from drowning. There were no marks of violence on the body.

The jury returned a verdict of “Suicide whilst of unsound mind”, the Coroner remarking that the case was a particularly sad one, and on his own and the jury's behalf he expressed sympathy to the relatives in their bereavement.

18 20 February 1915

GERMANS GROWING TIRED OF FIGHTING

WHAT PRUSSIAN GUARD TOLD LOCAL SOLDIER

“SOONER DECIDE WAR BY FOOTBALL MATCH” Several local soldiers, home from the Front this week, described to the “*Observer*” how they spent Yuletide in the firing line. Private Ernest **Somerfield** (19) of Chapel Street, Ryecroft, who first went into action with the 1st South Staffords in November, stated that during the concluding weeks of last year the regiment were occupying positions in the Armentieres district. Early on Christmas morning, bands were heard to strike up in the German lines, and not long afterwards numbers of the enemy troops left their trenches and walked about in full view of the British soldiers. “It was Christmas morning”, says Private Somerfield, “and no one cared to open fire, so we got out ourselves and went towards them”. Several shook hands, cigarettes and cigars were exchanged, and one of the Kaiser's men, who said that before the war he had worked in Birmingham, remarked that he would sooner decide the war by playing a football match than fighting. Another soldier, who looked like a Prussian Guard, made the astounding statement that throughout the war he had never fired on a British soldier, but always shot skywards. Seeing that several local “Tommies” have expressed doubts concerning a Christmas truce, Private Somerfield said he was prepared to swear that what he said is “absolute honest truth”. A few nights before Christmas he was on duty in the trenches, when the Warwicks made a gallant charge at midnight, but were met by overwhelming odds and suffered heavily. Every few minutes star lights burst in the air like lightning flashes at a firework display, and illuminated the battlefield all round. During those brief periods he could discern the opposing forces in a desperate struggle, and the noise of the conflict was almost deafening. Daylight revealed scores of men – Britishers and Germans – lying cold and dead near the barbed wire entanglements, while there were dozens of wounded in sore need of attention. Often, he said, drinking water was so scarce in the trenches that some of our men, suffering badly from thirst, could not resist the temptation to lap up water which had collected in puddles where comrades had been killed. One night he crept about a quarter of a mile from the trench to a farmhouse pump, but had hardly grasped the handle when – ping, ping! - and bullets missed him by inches. Evidently a sniper had a rifle trained on the pump, and, hearing a suspicious noise, opened fire. “Well”, thought Private Somerfield, “this is no place for me”, and to use his own phrase, he “scooted to some old communication trenches a few yards away”. There he lay till daybreak. When he ran to join his comrades, bullets came so fast that six or seven snipers must have been trying to fetch him down, but, he adds, “I dodged ‘em all right, or I shouldn't be



PRIVATE JACOB WIGLEY
(1st South Staffords),
Brewer Street.
(Missing.)



SERGEANT FRANK HEMS
(3rd Coldstream Guards),
South Street.
(Killed in action.)



PRIVATE WM. JOHN HAINES
(1st South Staffords)
Shiro Oak, Walsall Wood.
(Killed in action.)



PRIVATE GEORGE MASON
(2nd South Staffords),
Oriando Street.
(Wounded in the neck.)



PRIVATE WILLIAM PURCHASE
(1st South Staffords),
North Street Terrace.
(Missing.)



DRIVER ALFRED ERNEST FOWLE
(Royal Field Artillery),
Bescot Street.
(Prisoner of war.)



PRIVATE JOS. THOS. SOMERFIELD
(King's Shropshire Light Infantry),
Chapel Street, Ryecroft.



PRIVATE ERNEST SOMERFIELD
(1st South Staffords),
Chapel Street
(Frostbite.)



PRIVATE JOSEPH MAYIN
(2nd South Staffords),
Birch Street.
(Wounded in leg.)



PRIVATE WILLIAM FREDK. BELL
(1st South Staffords),
Bott Lane.
(Frostbite.)



PRIVATE JAMES SOMERFIELD
(Royal Welsh Fusiliers),
Chapel Street, Ryecroft.
(Missing.)



PRIVATE WM. HENRY MILLINGT
(South Staffords),
Brademan Street.
(Wounded in ankle.)



PRIVATE ARTHUR RICHARDS
(1st Coldstream Guards),
Green Lane.
(Wounded in thigh.)



PRIVATE ARTHUR THORPE
(1st South Staffords),
Newhall Street.
(Prisoner at Gottingen.)



PRIVATE SAMSON GREEN.
(2nd Manchester Regiment),
Wisemore.
(Frostbite.)

here to tell the tale". One morning someone was observed to be signalling with a handkerchief from the upper part of a ruined and deserted farmhouse. Several soldiers went to catch the culprit, and returned with a grey-headed Frenchman, who went down on his knees and begged for mercy. But he had been caught red-handed, and the Brigadier there and then sentenced him to death. The spy was straightway placed against a tree and shot. What with the cold and the rain, Private Somerfield thought people at home hardly realised the hardships our gallant lads are enduring. But in spite of all, they were not downhearted. In some of the trenches, it was impossible to get proper drainage, and more often than not there was nothing but to stand knees deep in mud. He had seen comrades obliged to cut off the bottom part of their greatcoats because these flaps had become so caked with slush as to impede their movements. He suffered considerably from the exposure, and was eventually sent to hospital with frostbite. "I was walking across a turnip field", he says, "when my feet became so heavy that I thought they were covered with mud. But it was worse than that. When I cut my boots off, my feet were as big and black as a kettle".

Two of Private Somerfield's brothers have also been in the firing line. James (28) served nine years with the colours, and was working as a canal boatman when summoned to join his regiment. He went out with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers during the early part of the war, but for some time nothing has been heard of him, and letters sent have been returned as "Untraceable". An elder brother, Joseph Thomas Somerfield (38), who served thirteen years with the colours, including eleven years in India, went to the front with the King's Shropshire Light Infantry a few weeks ago. Previous to joining the Army, Ernest was employed as a caster's help at the works of Caparns, Pleck Road.

19 27 February 1915

BOATMAN'S LAPSE

SOLD EMPLOYER'S COAL TO SOLDIER'S WIFE

FINED AT RUSHALL FOR THEFT At the Rushall Police Court on Monday, before Messrs W Precey and E J Shaw, a canal boatman named **Henry Young** (54) of Hospital Street, Birmingham, was charged with stealing a quantity of coal, value 4s 6d, the property of his employers, Messrs King Bros of Stourbridge, whilst Mrs Emily Longdon (26) of Canal Cottages, Hall Lane, Walsall Wood, was charged with receiving the coal. Both pleaded guilty.

Police-constable Moore stated that while on duty near the Black Cock Bridge, Hall Lane, Walsall Wood, at 10 o'clock on the night of February 19th, he saw a man throwing coal off a canal boat into Mrs Longdon's garden adjoining, and afterwards the female defendant picked it up and took it into her house. When questioned about it, Longdon said, "I am sorry. It is the first I have had. I gave him a shilling for it. I will give you anything if you will let me off". She afterwards accompanied witness to the canal boat, and pointed out Young, who was having supper in a cabin with his mate. When arrested, Young said, "You have made a mistake this time. I had not money off the woman", but on the way to the police station he admitted that he "did do it", and added, "Make it as light as you can". When charged, he replied, "It's no use denying it ; we paid the stabling and had a bit of grub with it". Returning to Mrs Longdon's home, witness found underneath the stairs 4 1/2 cwts of coal, which she admitted receiving from Young.

Mr H H Jackson (Walsall), who prosecuted on behalf of Messrs King Bros, stated that Young had been employed by the firm over three months, and seeing that he received an average wage of two guineas per week, there was absolutely no need for him to commit such an offence. The case against him, Mr Jackson urged, was an exceedingly bad one. Prosecutors, however, did not wish to press the charge against Longdon, who was the wife of an Army reservist, now serving his country.

Young said he had been connected with canal life for forty five years, and this was the first time he had ever been summoned for such an offence. His excuse was that the woman pleaded with him to allow her some coal, as she and the children had not had a bit of fire for two days. Knowing her husband very well, and being aware that he was with the colours, defendant consented.

The female defendant also said Young refused her request three times before he took pity on her.

Asked why she was without coal, Longdon said there was none to be obtained at the wharves. She admitted that she was receiving £1 a week separation allowance from the Government.

Mr W L Lewis (magistrates' clerk) : So that monetarily you are better off now than when your husband was at home?

Longdon : No, I'm not. Food is so dear now.

The Bench fined Young 40s and 20s costs, while the woman was bound over in the sum of £5 for three months.

20 13 March 1915

GALLANT WORCESTERS

SAVE SITUATION AT CRITICAL MOMENT

GENERAL FRENCH'S TRIBUTE Few but have read without feelings of pride how heroically the Worcesters withstood the German hordes at Shelwelt last Autumn and, related though it be in modest, unimaginative language, the official report testifies to the noble work performed by British "Tommies" during that critical time. But it is not till the full history of this war is written that we shall be able to truly appreciate how that gallant stand saved the situation. Goaded on by the Kaiser's mad orders to gain Calais at all costs, the enemy launched huge forces against one part of our line and, notwithstanding heavy losses, came on again and again, fighting desperately to break through. Success or failure was trembling in the balance – indeed it seemed almost hopeless to resist such tremendous pressure – when the Worcesters dashed up to the rescue and, with splendid sacrifice, turned the scales in our favour.

Several local soldiers participated in this brilliant action, and among them is Private **John Green** (26), who is now home wounded at Bath Street. Just a simple account, devoid of all flamboyant detail, he told the *Observer*. "Yes", he said, "the fighting there was fierce ; in fact, it was about the hottest corner I was in, but we managed to drive the Kaiser's men back and, lucky for me, I came through all right. What happened? Well, we were ordered to regain some lost positions in an important part of the line, so we went at it for all we were worth. Dangerous? Well yes, it was what you might call a risky operation, and we lost most men during a charge over some 900 yards of open ground, which was being swept by the German fire. There it was that several of my best chums were knocked over".

A typical Belgian country mansion seems, according to Private Green's narrative, to have been the centre around which the battle raged. For some time this house proved a danger spot, because the enemy had converted it into a miniature fort, and from the bedrooms and other concealed places were pouring a deadly fire on the British troops advancing. That place, he said, was a little too nasty to be nice, so a determined effort was made to silence it once and for all. Private Green was one of a company of twenty men who, in command of a Worcester man, Sergeant Sutton, attacked the house under a hail of bullets, and eventually forced the Germans to lay down their arms. In recognition of that gallant piece of work, Sergeant Sutton was awarded the DCM, "but", said Private Green, "it was not only in that instance, but in many others, that our sergeant acted as a truly brave fellow". When the desperate encounter had been won, and the Germans taught a lesson in true British style, the Worcesters returned to a certain town way back from the fighting line, and it was there they lined the streets in honour of Sir John French, who congratulated them on the noble manner in which they had upheld the brave traditions of the regiment, and added that they had proved their worth at one of the most critical periods of the war. "And I firmly believe", said Private Green, in no boastful fashion, but with a touch of sincere pride, "that, had the enemy managed to break through on that day, it would have meant very serious consequences, and possibly us losing much ground".

It was during a severe struggle among the trees, in what the "Tommies" styled "Coal Box Wood", that he witnessed an act of base ingratitude and treachery. A desperate combat had been in progress some time, and dead and wounded were lying about in scores, when an injured German asked a Walsall soldier for a drink of water. Hardly had "Tommy" stopped to assist him than the German whipped out a revolver and shot his benefactor in the back. "When we saw the poor fellow fall mortally wounded", said Private Green, "it fairly made our blood boil, and the only consolation is that that was the last shot that the German ever fired". It was at the Aisne that Private Green first

went into action, and his six months at the Front was mostly spent in the thick of the fighting, and he took part in numerous bayonet attacks. Once he heard two men in French attire asking questions of “youngsters” in the regiment and, becoming suspicious, arrested the couple, and later they were condemned as spies. He was with the regiment at Ypres during the bombardment, and describes it as “absolutely cruel the way such handsome buildings were destroyed by the German shells”. It was while walking in a village street that he fell a victim to a sniper, being hit in the thigh, but the din of warfare has also affected his hearing.

When called up on reserve, he was working as a boatman on the Birmingham Canal Navigations, having previously served some nine years with the colours. Two other brothers are in the Army, Corporal Harry Green of Blue Lane, who served through the Boer War without injury, and has re-enlisted ; while Luke is also with the forces.

21 20 March 1915

BLUE LANE SOLDIER KILLED



PRIVATE THOMAS KENNEDY
(1st King's Liverpool Regiment),
157, Blue Lane
(Killed in action.)

Official notice has been received by Mrs Alec Hawley of Gorway Cottage, stating that her brother, Private Thomas **Kennedy** (30), was killed in action in Flanders on November 11. After serving seven years with the colours, Private Kennedy came home from India, and had been in civilian life some three years and was employed on the L and NW permanent way when war was declared and, in accordance with mobilisation orders, he rejoined the 1st King's Liverpool Regiment. For weeks he experienced all the hardships of the Mons retreat, and was in the thick of the fighting. A Roman Catholic in religion, he attended St Patrick's Church, and lived at 157 Blue Lane up till the time of his mother's death last April. Two elder brothers are at present serving with the forces – John, a boatman, being on active service with the Staffords, while Luke was working as a labourer at the Alma Tube Works before he joined the county regiment.

22 8 May 1915

WALSALL POLICE COURT

BOATMAN'S NEGLECT OF WORK **Dennis Hawkins**, 70 Blue Lane West, was summoned by Oscar Johnson, Wisemore House, who claimed 11s damages as sustained through neglect of work. The complainant said Hawkins was employed by him as a boatman, and he was paid so much per voyage per day. The arrangement was to give or take a week's notice. He did not turn up to work that day week, and when witness sent to ascertain the reason, he said he was not coming again. Consequently plaintiff had to get a man from another job to fetch a load of slack. Defendant, who did not appear, was ordered to pay the amount claimed forthwith, with costs.

23 19 June 1915

LEACROFT

BOATMAN FINED At Cannock on Monday, for throwing a quantity of "bats" off a canal boat into the canal at Leacroft on May 21, **John Hadley**, boatman, was ordered to pay 9s. Police-constable Wilcox gave evidence in support of the charge.

24 26 June 1915

KILLED WHILE ATTACKING TURKS

LOCAL BOATMAN'S DEATH IN GALLIPOLI FIGHTING After having borne himself bravely with the Worcesters in much stubborn combat against the Teuton foe, it has been the honourable fate of Lance-Corporal **John Green** (26) of 110 Bath Street to give his life fighting for Britain against the Turks. Previously a boatman on the Birmingham Canal, he went on active service with the first troops which crossed to France last August, and was soon in the midst of shock and shell. Thrice wounded, he came home on leave last March, and to the "*Observer*" related many thrilling experiences on the battlefield. Rejoining his regiment on St Patrick's Day, he was later sent to the Dardenelles, arriving there on May 26th. It was during the severe fighting in Gallipoli on Monday that he lost his life. The British troops had made a charge, says another local soldier, Private S Salters of Green Lane, who is out there, and had captured the first two lines of the enemy's trenches, when Lance-Corporal Green was hit in the head by a bullet and instantly killed. A single man aged 26, he was promoted lance-corporal after joining the Mediterranean forces. A married brother, Harry, whose wife lives in Blue Lane West, served in the Boer War. A caster by trade, he now holds the rank of sergeant, and is expecting shortly to go to the front. Another brother, Luke, is also on active service.

25 3 July 1915

"DIED FIGHTING BRAVELY"

MAYOR'S SYMPATHETIC MESSAGE TO SOLDIER'S WIDOW A message of sympathy has been sent by the Mayor (Alderman J S Cotterell) to the widow of Private Henry Samuel Morrall (35) of 70 Blue Lane West, who is officially reported to have died of wounds sustained while in action with the South Staffords on May 19. After expressing condolence, His Worship adds that, "Nothing I can write will minimise the irreparable loss you have sustained, but I am sure the consciousness that your husband died fighting bravely for his King and Country and for that which we Britishers hold dear, will sustain and comfort you in your hour of trial". Although a native of Birmingham, Private Morrall has lived for some years locally, and followed the occupation of a chimney sweep. He served some time in the Boer War without injury, and re-enlisted last August, so that he might again do duty on the battlefield. About a fortnight before Christmas, he first crossed to the Continent, and was on active service right up to the time of his death. The widow is left with a couple of sons. Two of her brothers are serving with the colours, William **Hawkins**, who is a currier by trade, being with the Royal Horse Artillery, while Dennis, a boatman, is in the Army Remount Section.

26 17 July 1915

ARTILLERY DRIVER MEETS WITH ACCIDENT While in training with the Royal Field Artillery practising going into action at full gallop, Driver Alfred **Baggott** (20) of 2 Rupert Street met with an accident which placed him in hospital for several weeks, and this week he has been home on leave. The gun carriage, it seems, overturned, and he fell from horseback and sustained a fractured leg. Altogether he has been some seven months in the Army, and previously was employed as a caster by Messrs Mason and Burns. An elder brother, Harry, formerly a canal boatman, has been on active service with the South Staffords since last autumn, while another brother, Fred, recently joined the Territorials.

27 4 September 1915

BATH STREET SOLDIER INVALIDED HOME Buried in the trenches with earth scattered by the explosion of a shell, Private **George Henry Dugmore** of 2 Bath Street sustained an injury to his back, and has been invalided home. He had only been on active service three weeks, and this was his first experience of a heavy bombardment. The explosion rendered him unconscious, and it was not till some hours later that he recovered consciousness in Hospital. Formerly a canal boatman engaged on the Shropshire Union Canal, Private Dugmore joined the Army in January. A brother, William, served 12 years with the South Staffords in India, and re-enlisted in his old regiment for this war, being then employed as a bobber and mopper by Messrs Dewsbury of Littleton Street.

28 16 October 1915

“A DRUNKEN FREAK”

ABSENTEE SOLDIERS AND A BOATMAN CHARGED WITH THEFT

SACKS OF CORN STOLEN At the Guildhall on Monday, two soldiers named Edward McDonough (30), 29 Roma Road, Birmingham, and Henry Price (22), Westgate Street, Gloucester, and a boatman named **James Rice** (29), 65 Robinhood Street, Gloucester, were charged with stealing two sacks of Indian corn weighing 448 lbs, and three sacks, of the total value of £2 4s, the property of Smith Bros, Albion Mills, on October 8th.

WORKMAN DETECTIVE Henry Simpkins (59), Walsingham Street, employed at the mills, stated that at about 9.30 on the night in question he saw the three prisoners in a boat at the side of the mills. Being suspicious, he watched them, and saw Rice come from the boat and go into the mills. He returned with an empty sack. The other two men then assisted him to put a quantity of Indian corn into the sack, and two sacks, half full, were placed on the towing-path. The three of them afterwards went along Canal Street, the two soldiers carrying the sacks on their backs, and Rice easing them behind. At the Hame Makers' Arms, Blue Lane, they knocked on the front door, and someone opened the yard gates and let them in. They came out empty handed. Witness followed them back to the boat, and informed the foreman of what he had seen. Two sacks of Indian corn were missing from the mills. At 6.30 the next morning, he accompanied the police to the Hame Makers' Arms, and there saw two half sacks of corn in the yard. On returning to the boat, they found the three prisoners asleep in a cabin, where there were two more half sacks of Indian corn.

Cyrus Slater, Bentley Drive, foreman at the mills, said that the previous day the sacks of Indian corn were safe in the (?screen) room.

Mary Ashley, wife of the landlord of the public house mentioned, was warned that she need not answer any questions which might incriminate her, as the corn was found at her place, and that tended to show that she was the receiver of the property. She stated that the two soldiers were in her house at 8.30 on the night in question. They asked if her husband was in. She told them he was not, and Price then said he had a bag of stuff he wanted to sell. Witness told him he could leave it as long as he had come by it straight. At 9.40, her nephew told her they had left a couple of half sacks of Indian corn in the yard. Her husband did not know of it until the next morning.

Thomas Ashley, nephew of the previous witness, stated that at 9.40 on the night in question, he heard someone knocking at the yard gates, and on opening them, he saw the three prisoners with

two half bags of stuff, which they left for Mr Ashley to see next morning.

ARRESTED ON THE BOAT Police-constable Burrell said the matter was reported to him at 6.30 the next morning. He traced corn from the mills to the Hame Makers' Arms, and in the yard there found two sacks. He returned to the boat and arrested the prisoners, whom he found asleep. When charged with the theft, Rice said, "I was asleep ; they stole it". The soldiers came aboard at Stourport and helped me to Walsall". McDonough replied, "Rice does not know anything about it. We two stole it, and were going to sell it for some beer". Price also said Rice knew nothing about it, and that they took it where it was found with the intention of selling it.

The three prisoners now pleaded guilty, and said it was a drunken freak. They had been drinking all the week, and did not know what they were doing.

The Chief Constable said McDonough and Price were absentees, and that was the third time the former had absented himself in three months.

McDonough was sentenced to 21 days, and the other two prisoners were fined 20s or 14 days.

29 16 October 1915

KILLED DURING STAFFORDS ATTACK While taking part in the courageous attack on the German trenches made by the South Staffords a few weeks ago, Private **Henry Simeon Baggott** of 13 Milner's Yard, Green Lane, was instantly killed by a shot through the head. The sad news has been sent by a comrade, Private G Carter, who states that previous to the battle he and the deceased soldier agreed that if anything happened to either, the other should send word to relatives. The writer mentions that he lost four pals in the charge, and expresses the hope that relatives will be better able to bear their bereavement from the knowledge that he died gallantly doing his duty. The deceased soldier, who was 27 years of age and unmarried, had for months been in the thick of the fighting, and survived many heavy engagements without a scratch. Previous to the war, he was employed as a canal boatman by the Hatherton Furnace Company. Two relatives, Private John Boffey and Private Fred Baggott joined the Army last spring. The former, who is 20 years of age, is in hospital with fever, and has not been on active service. Prior to joining the Lincolns, he was employed as a nut and bolt screwer by a Darlaston firm. Private Fred Baggott (30) is in training with the local Territorials. Before enlisting, he worked for Messrs Barley of Wolverhampton.

30 6 November 1915

A BOATMAN'S FATE

DROWNED IN CANAL AT BIRMINGHAM ROAD The circumstances surrounding the death of **William Wilcox** (30), a canal boatman of 76 Aston Street, Toll End, Tipton, who was employed by **Arthur Worsey**, steerage contractor of Tipton, were inquired into by the Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the Guildhall on Monday afternoon.

Mary Ann Mansell, Aston Street, Toll End, Tipton, said the deceased man was her brother. He was a single man and lived with his parents. On Saturday morning he left home for work at 6.30 am, accompanied by his younger brother. At 2.30 the same day she heard he had met with an accident, and subsequently saw his body at the mortuary.

George Wilcox (15) said he worked with his brother. On Saturday at 7.30 they started out with an empty boat to go to Walsall Wood Colliery. Everything went all right until they got to the Birmingham Road locks. Here they passed three locks, and at the fourth witness was attending to the horse while his brother was shutting the outside gate with a boat hook. The shaft broke, and his brother fell into the water. He shouted for help, but no one came, and then ran to the spot where he saw his brother struggling in the water. Again he ran for help, and about ten minutes later another boat came along, and the body was recovered. Artificial respiration was tried, without avail.

In reply to the Coroner, it was stated that the man had been a boatman ever since he was 11 years of age, but he had never learned to swim.

William Burbidge, lock-keeper, Canal Side, Birmingham Road, deposed to finding the body lying on the canal side. He and an old man tried respiration for some time, but all to no effect.

In reply to the jury, witness said there had been other instances of the shaft breaking.

Dr Baker said death was due to suffocation by drowning. He added that the man's left wrist was deformed, but this would not interfere with his capacity as a boatman. A verdict of "Accidentally drowned" was returned, and sympathy expressed with the relatives.

31 18 December 1915

HORSE "ON THREE LEGS"

BIRMINGHAM BOATMAN FINED FOR CRUELTY At the Rushall Police Court on Monday, a Birmingham boatman named **Thomas Lawk** (48) of Sheepecote Street, Birmingham, was summoned for cruelty to a horse.

Mr Archie Tucker prosecuted on behalf of the Walsall Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Police-constable Pass stated that he saw defendant in Daw End Lane in charge of a horse which was going very lame on the off foreleg. The animal, which was harnessed with boat tackle, stood with its foot several inches from the ground, and when witness pointed this out, defendant admitted that the horse had come from Birmingham with a canal boat which had been tied up at Daw End, and the following morning he intended to take another load back from Walsall Wood. The animal, said witness, was practically standing on three legs, and it was the worst case of cruelty he had ever seen.

Mr A E Paley (veterinary surgeon) of Walsall said the animal – a bay gelding – was in fair condition, but aged and extremely lame. At one examination he found strained tendons and ringbone of long standing, while there was also canker and contracted foot. This condition had been in existence for at least several months, and the horse was unfit to walk, much less work. All the time it held its foot up as if in great pain, but nevertheless the defendant allowed this to go on for several days before he had the animal slaughtered. "These cases", added Mr Paley, "are very difficult to get hold of, because the horses are kept almost continually to the canal side".

When asked if he pleaded guilty or not guilty, defendant appeared not to understand.

The Magistrates' Clerk (Mr W L Lewis) to the policeman : Is he deaf?

The Officer : He was all right when I stopped him. I think he is acting half soaked.

Mr A W Greatrex (presiding magistrate) to defendant : Was it your horse?

Defendant : Yes, I expect it was.

Mr Greatrex said he and his fellow magistrates – Alderman J F Binns and Mr W M Lester – considered it a very bad case, and they were dealing with him very leniently in fining him £3. He was also ordered to pay 10s 6d, the veterinary surgeon's fee.

32 22 January 1916

LAME BOAT HORSE

WAS CONDITION MECHANICAL OR PAINFUL? The magistrates at Rushall Police Court were occupied some time on Monday in hearing a case in which a canal boatman named **John Handley** (65) of Bracebridge Street, Birmingham, was summoned for working a horse while in an unfit state, and the owner, **Frank Wright** of Chester Street Wharf, Birmingham, was summoned for causing it to be worked.

Mr H A Tucker prosecuted for the Walsall Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, while Mr Norman Birkett (instructed by Messrs Phillip Baker and Co, Birmingham) defended.

Police-constable Pass stated that on Monday last he and Police-sergeant Lewis were on duty near the Daw End canal bridge at midday on the previous Monday, when they saw an aged grey gelding drawing an empty barge. The animal was very lame on the near fore leg, and when spoken to about it, Handley, who was in charge, said, "I know he is lame. Our vet blistered him and turned him out about four months ago, and told our gaffer the horse was fit to work". Witness had the animal removed to a stable at the Daw End Liberal Club, where it was examined by Mr Paley (veterinary surgeon).

Mr Birkett (for the defence) : Do you know there are horses go lame without suffering pain? - I could not say.

Do you know that when a child is put to walk too early it gets bow legs? But although it walks lame, it suffers no pain.

The Magistrates' Clerk (Mr W L Lewis) : Isn't that more a question for a professional witness?

Further questioned, the constable said the horse's fetlock was very hot and tender to the touch. When he lifted the foot, the animal flinched.

Evidence corroborating this statement was given by Police-sergeant Lewis.

VET'S EVIDENCE Mr A E Paley (veterinary surgeon) said the animal was in fair working condition but extremely lame in the near fore leg, where he found contracted tendons and ringbone. There was also a knuckling of the fetlock. Although a certain amount of lameness was mechanical, yet the horse was evidently suffering pain, and had great difficulty to walk. He judged that the lameness was of long standing. Mr Paley said that when he questioned Handley about the horse, defendant admitted that the animal had been lame for some time, and was turned out to grass for three months last summer. When asked is the owner knew he had brought the animal out, he replied, "Yes, he saw it on Sunday".

Replying to questions by Mr Birkett, witness agreed that stumbling over rough ground might have aggravated the animal's lameness and caused the swelling.

Mr Birkett : Is it not a fact that there are thousands of horses on the road today which are suffering from ringbone?

Mr Paley : Yes, lots of them are in such a condition that their owners ought to be prosecuted.

What I mean is that there are horses with ringbone, yet not suffering pain?

Witness : It all depends on the type and situation of the ringbone. In my opinion the horse was suffering pain, and had been for some time. He agreed that after the horse had been blistered and turned out to grass, there might have appeared no reason why it should not be set to work again.

Mr Birkett : Didn't the defendant Handley strike you as a man who had an affection for his horse?

Mr Paley : He answered my questions in a very candid way, and I found no evidence of abuse.

Opening the case for the defence, Mr Birkett contended that no evidence had been submitted of guilty knowledge on the part of the owner, and the case against him was dismissed by the magistrates.

FIFTY YEARS A BOATMAN Giving evidence on oath, the defendant Handley said he had been a canal boatman for over fifty years, and this was the first complaint ever made against him. He had worked this horse on the canal between Birmingham and Cannock Chase for four years, doing two and three journeys a week. He knew the horse was lame, but did not think it was in any pain, seeing that after it was turned out for some time the vet had passed it as fit for work. If the horse had been in much pain, they would have discovered it and used the spare horse which was in the stable. The towing-path at Daw End was very rough with brick ends, etc, "in fact", added witness, "it's one of the worst bits of road we have to travel".

Replying to Mr Tucker, witness admitted that the horse flinched when the policeman touched its foot, but he did not think this was because it was suffering pain.

Witness was wearing a munition worker's badge, and in reply to Mr Birkett said the firm were continually being pressed by the Birmingham Corporation to do all possible to maintain the coal supply for war work.

DEADENED LIMB WITH COCAINE A Birmingham veterinary surgeon, Mr Herbert Yeomans, said that when he first saw the horse last August, he found it had an overshot fetlock. After being blistered, the animal was turned out for six weeks. When witness saw it at the conclusion of that time, he could find no sign of it being in pain and certified it as fit for work. Learning that the animal had been stopped by the police, he went to the stable at Daw End to examine it on January 11th. From what he saw, he judged the greater part of the lameness was mechanical. In order to ascertain whether this was so, he rendered the affected leg devoid of sensation by means of cocaine injections. The animal still walked decidedly lame, but not quite so lame as before. This proved that the greater part of the lameness was mechanical.

Replying to Mr Tucker, witness said the fact that the animal flinched when its foot was lifted was no proof that it was continually in pain. The person who lifted the foot could easily have twisted it in

such a fashion that would cause pain, yet not be possible while actually working.

Asked why he ordered the horse to be destroyed, Mr Yeomans said he did so not because he thought the horse could not be cured but because, having regard to its age, eighteen years, it would not have paid the owner to keep it while it was getting well. Further than that, Mr Paley would not allow it to be walked to Birmingham, and to have conveyed it by float would have meant a lot of expense.

Mr R H Holden said he and his fellow magistrates (Mr E Wilkes and Mr E J Shaw) believed there had been a certain amount of carelessness in the case but, having regard to the circumstances, it would be dismissed. They felt the police were quite justified in bringing it forward.

33 22 January 1916

CANAL BOATMAN DROWNED

SUPPOSED TO HAVE FALLEN WHEN DESCENDING TO BARGE On Thursday evening the Deputy Coroner (Mr Frank Cooper) conducted an inquiry at the Guildhall into the circumstances attending the death of a canal boatman named **Richard Merchant** (55), who had lived at High Park Row, Soho Street, Smethwick.

Charles Hackett of 8 Middlemore Road, Smethwick, said that he and deceased had worked together on the same boat for two years, and on Tuesday they were returning from Norton Canes to Birmingham, both of them being perfectly sober. When they arrived at the third lock, Birchills, shortly before 9 pm, Merchant left the boat, tied it up, and witness went on to the next lock. He last saw his mate standing by the rail on the top of the lock gate, as if about to descend to the boat again. He would have to get down that way, though it was not safe, and he (witness) considered there ought to be a ladder. The boat came on, but he found that Merchant was not on the boat. He at once concluded that he must have fallen in, and tried to find the body with a shaft, but he was unsuccessful, and the lock-keeper, whom he fetched, tried for some time with a rake to no better purpose. Eventually the pond was emptied, and Merchant's body was found underneath two boats. A rope was tied to his body, and with this it was drawn out after the pond had been refilled and the boats refloated. Merchant was a good swimmer, but he was of opinion that he must have caught his head against something as he fell into the water and become unconscious.

William Cassell, keeper of the Top Lock, Birchills, said he searched for the body for three hours with a rake before the pond was emptied. As regarded the suggestion of the previous witness that there should be ladders on lock gates, he considered that the iron "holds" which were now provided were sufficient. This was the first accident of the kind which had occurred during the seven years he had been at the Birchills Lock.

A verdict of "Accidentally drowned" was returned, the Deputy Coroner and the jury expressing sympathy with the relatives of the deceased.

34 12 February 1916

LOCAL POLICE NEWS

NEGLECTED WORK **Cornelius Wood**, boatman of 22 Upper Green Lane, did not appear to answer a summons by Oscar Johnson of Wisemore House, who claimed 17s 6d as damages for alleged neglect of work. Complainant stated that defendant did not attend on Monday and Tuesday, and the horse was therefore at play for two days. The Bench made an order for payment of the amount claimed within seven days.

35 19 February 1916

EXCITED BY ZEPPELIN ALARM

OLD WOMAN'S DEATH IN THE WORKHOUSE Death from apoplexy caused by the sounding of the Zeppelin alarm was returned at an inquest conducted by the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the Workhouse on Monday afternoon, relative to the death of **Elizabeth Street** (aged 71) who, together with her husband, **John Street**, formerly a canal boatman, had been an inmate of the Workhouse for the last five years.

Emily Barratt, a nurse in the female department of the Workhouse, stated that when the siren

sounded on Thursday night to give warning of enemy aircraft, a number of inmates in the Workhouse commenced rushing about. Eight of the women, including deceased, who were in bed on the top floor, came down into the serving room, and while witness was trying to quieten them, the deceased fell into her arms, frothing at the mouth, and died shortly afterwards.

Dr Fox stated that the woman was of very stout build, and he was of opinion that she died of apoplexy due to the excitement.

The jury returned a verdict as above.

36 26 February 1916

THRASHED A HORSE

BOATMAN WHO DESERVED SIMILAR PUNISHMENT “It's a pity you cannot have a similar thrashing on your back”, said Alderman J Clare to a boatman named **John Palin** of Halesowen Street, Blackheath, who was summoned at the Guildhall on Monday for cruelly ill-treating a horse on February 10. The owner, **James Brookes** of Station Road, Old Hill, was also summoned for causing it to be ill-treated.

Police-constable Travis stated that while on Pagett's Bridge at the Pleck, he saw defendant and another man, each in charge of a horse, which were drawing empty boats. Both men were flogging the horses and making them run, and were apparently trying to race each other. When witness called out to them they took no notice, although he was in uniform, but continued beating the animals, and he watched them for about 200 yards along the towing-path until they disappeared round a bend. Witness walked along Pleck Road and stopped defendant at a lock near Bridgeman Street. There witness noticed a number of weals on the animal's body, and Palin admitted, while taking the harness off, that there were sores on the horse's shoulder. When asked if his employer knew about the condition of the horse, Palin replied, “Yes, he had the collar padded on purpose to ease it”. Later, witness visited the owner at Old Hill, and Brookes then admitted that he had seen the animal on the night previous to its coming to Walsall. He also said he knew the sores were there, with the exception of the top one, and that the collar had been padded.

Mr A E Paley (veterinary surgeon) stated that when he examined the animal – a black gelding – he found it in very poor condition and terribly wealed on the off side, as if it had been severely thrashed. It had also perspired very freely. On the near shoulder were four wounds of long standing, and he pronounced the animal as being totally unfit for work.

Palin said that he could not agree with the veterinary surgeon that there were so many weals.

Mr S E Loxton : At any rate, you wouldn't like such a number on your back?

Palin : No, by gum.

Brookes said the horse had always been in rather poor condition, and they had been unable to fatten it.

Alderman Clare said the Bench considered it a very bad case, and there was no excuse for the boatman being so inhumane. “You admit you wouldn't like such a thrashing on your back”, added the presiding magistrate to Palin. “It's a bad job you have not got something like it, for then you might have more feeling for the animal. You will be fined 20s, and are very lucky you are not being sent to jail”.

Brookes was fined 40s.

37 1 April 1916

LOCAL POLICE NEWS

TO THE POLICE STATION IN A HANDCART **Joseph Perry** (29), boatman, 300 Parkbrook, and Agnes Martin (45), married woman of the same address, were charged with being drunk and incapable in Birchills Street and Shaw Street respectively. Police-constable Lester stated that he found both defendants lying helplessly drunk in the street. Neither of them could walk, and he had to convey them to the police station on a handcart. Both pleaded guilty, and were each fined 4s.

38 20 May 1916

HAMPERING GOVERNMENT WORK

DAMAGES AGAINST BOATMAN FOR ABSENCE FROM WORK At the Guildhall on Wednesday morning, a boatman named **James Faulkner** of 64 Green Lane was summoned by **Job Wilkes** of 74 Leamore Lane, who claimed £1 17s for damages sustained through defendant's alleged neglect of work.

Mr W C Checkley, who appeared for Wilkes, stated that he was employed by the Birchills Furnaces Ltd, who were now a Government controlled concern, to deliver pig iron to their various customers by boat. Wilkes in his turn employed the defendant, among others, as a boatman. He was employed subject to seven days' notice, and he was paid at the rate of 4s 10d per turn. From the furnaces in Green Lane to the Pleck and back would be a turn, and longer distances a turn and a half or more, to Birmingham and back being reckoned, for instance, as two and a half turns.

Defendant : You have got to stop and empty the boat.

Mr Checkley said that the journey to the Pleck and back and to Great Bridge and back, which altogether meant two and a half turns, had regularly been done in a day, so they would gather what the rate of pay was. In four days last week, in fact, defendant earned £2 3s, and the previous week three guineas for less than a full week. On Monday and Tuesday, May 8 and 9, Faulkner absented himself from work. About 8 o'clock on the Tuesday, complainant went to see him, and he said he would be at work in a few minutes, but he did not turn up. The consequence of his absence on those two days was that four boat loads of pig iron were not delivered to Messrs John Russell and Co at the Pleck, which meant that they were 108 tons short. For delivery from Green Lane to the Pleck, Wilkes was paid at the rate of eight pence per ton, plus five per cent. That meant he would have received £3 15s 8d for the 108 tons, and out of it he would have paid £1 18s 8d to the two men; so that he would have for himself £1 17s. Apart from that, one of the horses was standing idle in the stable for two days. It was a serious matter for the Birchills Furnaces, because, being unable to get the four boats of pig iron delivered, they had to handle the 108 tons three times over to get them out of the way. It was also a serious matter for Messrs Russell, whose works too were Government controlled, and they had had to contend with great difficulties owing to shortage of materials. Wilkes had constantly had to complain of this man's absence ; on Monday – since the summons was issued – he was absent without explanation.

Wilkes gave evidence, and the defendant, who said he could not keep up the work because it was too heavy for him, was ordered to pay the amount claimed.

Mr Checkley said that on one day defendant finished a turn at 11 o'clock, and at his own suggestion he was put on loading pig iron for the rest of the day. That did not look as though he was being overworked.

39 20 May 1916

WALSALL WOOD

A BOATMAN'S LANGUAGE At Rushall a boatman named **James Holbrook**, 8 London Street, Smethwick, was summoned for using obscene language on May 3. Police-constable Barrett stated the facts of the case, and defendant, who did not appear, was fined 22s 2d.

40 22 July 1916

LOCAL POLICE NEWS

BOATMAN'S NEGLIGENCE OF WORK **Daniel Wright**, 97 Old Birchills, was summoned for neglecting the work of Oscar Johnson, Portland Street, his employer. He said that he had stayed away two days on his own account, and he should not pay for more than two days. Mr F Cooper, who represented Mr Johnson, said that defendant was a boatman employed by him, who had for five days stopped away from work. The horse and boat were kept idle as a result, and in order to get the slack it had to be wheeled out of stock. He also pointed out that four of the dates were Mondays and Tuesdays, showing that the defendant made a practice of staying away in the first part of the week. Damages to the amount of £2 4s were awarded to the plaintiff.

41 2 September 1916

A DISHONEST BOATMAN **Joseph Rounds**, 76 Upper Green Lane, Walsall, was, at the Police Court on Wednesday, summoned for stealing two cwts of coal, value 3s, belonging to Oscar Johnson, Wisemore, Walsall.

Police-constable Lester said that on the 21st inst he was on duty in plain clothes near the Navigation Inn at Birchills, and saw the defendant in charge of a boat. He saw him take about 2 cwt of coal from the boat and put it in some gardens at the rear of the houses in Dalkeith Street. He also saw someone hand the young man something. Subsequently defendant admitted that he had been given a shilling to throw the coal over into the gardens. Witness made inquiries among the neighbours, but no one would own the coal, so he took charge of it.

Oscar Johnson gave evidence to show that the coal was his property and that the defendant had been employed by him since September 1915, and although only 18 years old, could earn 30s to 35s a week. He also added that the defendant was badged as a boatman under the Electricity Department. In reply to a question whether he would continue to employ and trust him, witness replied that he should continue to keep him at work, and added, "You know how we are placed".

He was put on his good behaviour for three months, and Mr Jupp advised him to behave himself differently now that he had been given a chance.

42 23 September 1916

FIRST FATALITY

ON THE WALSALL CORPORATION TRAMWAYS

DANGER OF LEAVING CARS WHILE IN MOTION The danger of leaving a tramcar when it was moving was shown at the Walsall Union Buildings on Tuesday night, when Mr J F Addison (Borough Coroner) held an inquest relative to the death of **John Street** (65), formerly a canal boatman, of no fixed address.

Mr Victor Crooke (Assistant Town Clerk) and Mr H L Horsfield (Tramway Manager) were present on behalf of the Walsall Corporation.

Merven Evans, a porter at the Union, identified the body as that of a man who had been resident, at brief intervals, in the Workhouse. He was discharged on August 29th, when he said he had a job to go to. On September 7th he was again admitted, when he was brought in from Walsall Hospital by a relieving officer, and he died on September 17th. The man had some relatives, but they could not be found ; and his wife died last February, and her death was also the subject of an inquest.

George Shappard, 21 George Street, Walsall, said that about 6.30 am on Friday September 1 he was at North Walsall, going to Thomas's coal yard, and saw a tramcar going slowly over Pratt's Bridge. He saw the deceased riding at the back of the car, holding the handle of the car, and saw him jump off. He seemed to reel round and then fall down in the middle of the road. The tram went on for about 120 yards. He could not say whether the driver knew or not what had happened, nor could he say whether anyone was on the platform of the car at the time, as all his attention was on the man who was jumping off.

Walter Henry Young, Portland Street, who was employed at Talbot-Stead Tube Works, said he was travelling on the top of the car, and got off at the depot. He saw a man lying on the top of Pratt's Bridge in the roadway, after the car had passed the bridge. The conductor was near witness on the top of the car collecting the fares, and on noticing the man, at the same time blew his whistle and hurried off the car to the man's assistance. The driver also got off the car.

By Mr Crooke : Witness did not hear the deceased ask the conductor to stop the car, and he (the conductor) was on the top of the car at the time.

John Lees, Essex Street, the conductor of the car, said he first was aware of what had happened when he heard someone say a man had fallen off the car. The deceased had been sitting inside the car (about the fourth passenger inside), and said nothing about wanting the car to stop, or that he wanted to get off at Pratt's Bridge. The man was unconscious when witness got to him.

In answer to Mr Crooke, witness said a passenger had no right to leave a car when in motion.

TRAVELLING SLOWLY Enoch Allmarks (the driver of the car) said the first he knew of a man

having fallen was when he heard the emergency stop, and he went back to the man, who was unconscious and had a little blood coming from his mouth. It was a rule to go slowly up the hill, and they were going slowly that morning.

Police-sergeant Shepard (Coroner's Officer) gave evidence showing that deceased had been used to stopping at the Bull's Head Lodging House when he was not at the Workhouse. He found that he was occasionally employed at North Walsall to unload coal. He stated, when he left the lodging house, that he was going there to work. The man was subsequently admitted to the hospital.

Dr Fox said the deceased was a feeble man, with very thickened arteries. He knew him before the accident. He had been semi conscious since admittance to the Union, and could not answer questions intelligently. There was no paralysis. He died on Sunday. The *post mortem* examination which he had made showed there was a slight wound over the eye, and an abrasion, but there was no fracture of the skull. The arteries of the brain were very diseased, and there was haemorrhage on the brain, due to a rupture of the blood vessel. The arteries were so brittle that a rupture would have been easily caused in a person like the deceased.

The Coroner said the man probably did what he had done many times before, and tried to leave the car while it was moving.

NO ONE TO BLAME A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned, and the jury expressed the opinion that no blame attached to anybody.

Mr Victor Crooke said that the jury must have seen for themselves that persons would take the risk of leaving cars while in motion, and the Corporation and Mr Horsfield, who was, in particular, officially responsible for the proper running of the cars, were very much averse to this, and asked all persons to comply with the bye laws and not leave the cars without asking the conductor to ring the bell. He was reminded that although the Walsall cars had been running for many years, this was the first fatal accident which had happened.

The Coroner said this was most remarkable, and was very creditable to those who had charge of the cars.

43 23 September 1916

LOCAL TRIBUNAL A boatman aged 27, previously granted two months' exemption, was applied for by his employer, who said he had failed in his efforts to replace him. The Chairman said the Military Authorities were exchanging older men for those who were likely to make better soldiers. No exemption ; not to be called for a month, the Tribunal undertaking to assist the employer to get a suitable man.

44 3 February 1917

CANAL ICE BOAT SUNK

BARGEES SAID TO HAVE REGARDED IT AS A "VICTORY"

DANGER OF LOCKED WATERWAY Energetic action has been taken by the authorities during the past week with a view to minimising the serious loss which is being suffered, both from the local and the national point of view, by reason of the freezing of the canals and the constant stoppage of water-borne coal supplies from Cannock Chase. The ice boats were kept at work on Sunday, but it was found that the breaking of the ice (which was several inches thick) was not sufficient to free a passage unless the blocks of ice were moved bodily out of the canal at certain bends and locks. The great difficulty here was shortage of labour, and in response to an appeal to the Ministry of Munitions and the General Officer commanding a Midland corps, a number of soldiers have been placed at the disposal of the Canal Company for the purpose of working the ice breakers and removing the ice. A party of soldiers started working on Thursday, and another reach of the canal was tackled yesterday.

There are two points to which the special attention of manufacturers and steerers are directed. One is the necessity for the boatmen to follow the ice boat without delay, and so keep the passage open ; the other is the great advantage of several boats being tied together and all the horses being joined in one large team, instead of single horsed barges attempting to make the passage separately.

Combination in this way makes the work for each individual boatman and horse much lighter, and leads to expedition in delivery.

The attention of the Colliery Companies is directed to the desirability during the present emergency of not overloading the boats, because if overloaded the danger of their grounding is considerably increased.

The ice boats will be kept working all through the weekend, and the Mayor appeals to the patriotism of all concerned to do their utmost to keep up the supplies of coal, on which depends the production of munitions, which our soldiers at the front are urgently calling for.

At a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, held at Kingscourt, Upper Bridge Street, on Monday afternoon, Mr C F Hurst, who presided, spoke of the terrible difficulties that would be occasioned if the canals were frozen up during this severe weather. A letter had been sent to the canal company, who replied that every effort had been made, and would continue to be made, to keep ice on the canal broken. It was intended to keep the ice boats working on Sundays, but the company's difficulties were increased by the shortage of labour, while there was not the necessary co-operation on the boatmen's part, owing to their stupidity as to "turns" when following the ice boat. The Chairman pointed out the importance of the waterways being kept open at this juncture ; if the canal was not available, supplies would not come through, and the electricity current might be cut off. Both sides might co-operate a little more to secure the desired result. The canal company might show a little more energy and promptitude, and so might the boatmen, who were inclined to take things easy when their boats were lying up, and they were still being paid. With speeding up in both directions, things might be managed to better advantage.

Mr Ledbury did not think the best possible steps had been taken to keep the canal open. At present it was closed, and that was a serious matter to factories generally and it meant, so far as he could see, that they would close down. Ice was there that afternoon, and he had the cheerful news that the ice boat had been sunk, and a number of boatmen in a neighbouring public house seemed to regard it as a victory for themselves that the ice boat had gone down! He understood it was being got up, and that the canal would be opened perhaps that night, but the boatmen were waiting in the public house, and without their help the canal would be closed up again next morning. If the canal remained closed, it would have a very serious effect on the factories, and it was deplorable that there had not been sufficient co-operation.

The Chairman : We have been most anxious to have it kept open. I can only hope the waterway will be got open as quickly as possible, for I tremble to think what the effect will be on the Pleck Road and munitions if it is delayed any longer.

Mr Wheway said it was the canal company's duty to keep open the canal, and they should not sit down to excuses that the boatmen were having a good time and that their pay was going on. It was going to hit this district very seriously indeed if the canal were held up. The ice might last another three weeks, and the difficulties of those who had to trust to railways would be greatly increased. Very strong representations ought to be made to the canal company as to the necessity of keeping open the canal.

Councillor Tucker pointed out that failure of supplies to the electricity works might throw the whole town in darkness and also stop power to munitions works. He proposed that a further very strongly worded letter be sent to the canal company on the matter.

Mr Ledbury seconded, and the resolution was carried.

45 3 March 1917

HELPING HIMSELF

THEFT OF COAL AT OLD BIRCHILLS LOCKS That he was tempted to steal because he had no coal at home was the excuse advanced at the Police Court on Monday by Stephen Shenton (47), labourer, 26 Farringdon Street, who was charged with stealing a half hundredweight of coal, value 9d, belonging to Edward Henry Holmes.

Evidence was given by **Joseph Hawkins**, a boatman in the prosecutor's employment, that on Saturday he was in charge of a boat going to Darlaston with a load of coal. When the boat was in

the locks at Old Birchills, prisoner appeared on board the boat, picked up a bag of coal and walked off with it. Witness shouted at him, but was too far away to prevent him from taking the coal.

The theft was witnessed by Detective Bell who, in consequence of information, had been keeping prisoner under observation. When coming away from the locks, he was asked by Detective Bell what he was going to do with the coal, and he replied, "I am going to take it home". When charged at the Police Station, he said, "We had got no fire, and I thought I would take a bit of coal home. I will never do it again".

Prisoner, who appeared in very weak health, told the magistrate that there had been no fire at all in his house. He lived with his mother.

In consideration of the fact that prisoner had borne a good character, the magistrates placed him on probation for three months.

46 21 July 1917

RUSHALL

LIGHTENING THE BOAT At Rushall on Monday, a boatman named **Joseph Hawkins** of Dale Street, Tipton, was summoned for depositing slack in the Birmingham Canal on July 5. **Thomas Martin** (an inspector of the Canal Company) said he saw the defendant shovelling slack out of a boat into the canal. When spoken to, defendant said he had been shovelling water into the canal. The offence took place near the cement works at Lindley, near Rushall, and there were many complaints made to the Canal Company about this kind of thing, as boats were found to have shortages. Replying to Mr R H Holden (magistrate), the inspector said that when slack was shovelled out of a boat it lightened the boat and made it easier to get along. Defendant was ordered to pay 10s 6d.

47 4 August 1917

BOATMAN'S SERIOUS ACCIDENT **John Wood**, aged 54, a canal boatman of 55 Bridgeman Street, met with a serious accident while at work on the canal at Bloxwich on Saturday afternoon. When pushing a fully laden coal boat, he overbalanced and, falling into the water, he was crushed against the canal side by the boat. He suffered serious injuries, which necessitated his removal to and detention at the hospital.

48 25 August 1917

THE CIGARETTE LAW Ignorance of the law which provides that cigarettes must not be sold to children under the age of 16 was pleaded by Rebecca Coe, 279 Bloxwich Road, and **Alexander Thomas**, Chilton Cottage, Monmore Green, who were summoned at the Guildhall on Monday, the first for selling cigarettes to James Palfrey, aged 11 years, and Thomas for aiding and abetting in the commission of the offence.

The evidence showed that on July 28 Thomas, a canal boatman, asked Palfrey to get him some cigarettes, and Mrs Coe, having ascertained that they were for a boatman, served the boy with the cigarettes. Palfrey was intercepted by Police-constable Gibbs as he left the shop.

Each defendant had to pay a fine of 2s and 2s 6d costs.

49 8 September 1917

BOATMAN AND THE SLACK William Lovekin, boatman, 27 Park Lane, Oldbury, was summoned at Rushall on Monday for unlawfully throwing slack into the canal on August 27.

Detective inspector T Martin (Birmingham Canal Co) said defendant shovelled about half a ton of slack out of his boat into the canal. It was a great nuisance, said witness, this throwing of slack into the canal ; it was not only a waste, but the Canal Company were repeatedly put to the expense of having the canal dredged.

Defendant, in answer to the Bench, said that the boat was overloaded, and was dragging on the bottom all the way.

Mr Binns (magistrate) : Why did you not complain at the colliery? Somebody was paying for slack

they did not get, apparently.

Defendant : It was "snap" time at the colliery when I was there.

A fine of 10s was imposed.

50 8 September 1917

GIRL'S TRAGIC FATE

SUICIDE BEFORE "SHAME AND DISGRACE"

SEQUEL TO A POLICE ARREST A prolonged enquiry was held on Monday by the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) into the circumstances attending the death of Rhoda Elizabeth Wilcox (15), whose home was at 114 Hospital Street, and who had been employed as a clerk by Mr Frank Morgan, wholesale grocer, Vicarage Place. Mr Enoch Evans appeared for the girl's parents.

Rhoda Wilcox, the mother, said her daughter had been working for Mr Morgan since April last. About eleven o'clock on the previous morning, witness was informed by the police that her daughter had been taken into custody on a charge of embezzlement, and that she (witness) was wanted at the Police Station to bail her out. She at once went to the Police Station, and there saw her daughter, who was crying bitterly. Witness at once became surety for her appearance, and afterwards took her daughter to Mr Evans's office. On the way she asked the child what made her do it, and her daughter replied, "I don't know, mum", and burst out crying. All the time she was in Mr Evans's office she was sobbing, although witness had not reproached her. She said they had charged her with embezzling £2 10s, but that there was a £1 note underneath the table that they wanted her to own to having had, and that she would not do so, as she knew nothing about it. They afterwards went home together, and had dinner. Her daughter then seemed pretty cheerful, and witness, being anxious to visit a married daughter at Bescot, went out for that purpose, leaving the girl at home doing some ironing. When she got back about 5.50, deceased was missing, and as she had not returned at 7.30, witness went to enquire for her at the house of a girl friend, but could get no tidings of her, though later she heard that deceased had been seen between three and four o'clock in the afternoon going past the top of Gladstone Street, and that when questioned as to why she was not at work, she replied that she was having a half day's holiday. Witness thought her daughter might be staying the night at the house of another girl friend in Blakenhall Lane, but she was very anxious about her, and did not go to bed all night.

The Coroner : Had you ever known her stay out all night before?

Witness : I had not, and that was what was putting me about.

Answering further questions, witness said her daughter was very much upset by this charge being made against her ; she took it very hard.

The Coroner : Had she been a troublesome girl?

Witness : No ; she was not a bit of trouble ; she was such a good girl.

Deceased, witness said, had not been in any other situation before going to Mr Morgan.

NO MESSAGE BEFORE THE ARREST The Coroner : The first intimation you had that something was wrong came to you from the police?

Witness : I knew nothing until they came to tell me she was in the Police Station. That is what surprised me, because I thought I ought to have been fetched to the works instead of my girl being locked up.

The Coroner : You had no message from Mr Morgan?

Witness : No.

In reply to Mr Evans, witness said that her daughter regularly attended St Peter's Sunday School, and both the Rev C E McCreery and the teacher spoke very highly of her, the former saying what a splendid girl she was, and what a trouble it was to the whole church to think that her life had been lost. Questioned regarding her daughter's earnings, witness said that she started at 6s a week, and was afterwards advanced to 7s a week. Her duties included receiving cash when her employer was away, and it was in connection with some of these payments that this trouble had arisen.

Do you remember your daughter saying that Mr Morgan had promised to send for you if she would admit she had taken the money? If she admitted she had thrown that £1 note under the table and

refunded the money that was missing, he would forgive her, but she said, "No ; I know nothing about that £1 note, and I won't own up to that".

In my office, was the girl unable to speak for sobbing? - She was, but I did not reproach her.

Mr Evans : You did not. You were as kind as it was possible for a mother to be to a child, but she could not get over the dread of what had happened? - No ; that is what has killed her. She said repeatedly, "I don't know what I shall do".

Mr Evans, on the suggestion of the Coroner, entered the witness box and spoke to the interview he had with the mother and child at his office. He said the girl was simply doubled up with grief, and it was impossible to get a connected statement from her. He did not think he ever saw a girl in such a state of distress before.

Joseph Fletcher, boatman, 53 St Mary's Row, spoke to finding the body in the canal near Pratt's Bridge on the previous Saturday. He said it was fully dressed, and had the appearance of having been in the water several days.

EMPLOYER'S EVIDENCE Frank Morgan, wholesale grocer, examined by the Coroner, said the girl had been employed by him since about April, to receive and check goods and to do duplicates out of the ledger. She had really to do minor duties in the office ; there was nothing very particular for her to do. He agreed that her wages were 7s a week.

From the time she entered your employ up till recently, had you any complaint to make about her conduct? - No, but I didn't think she was hardly straight in some things. Money was missed, but I could not say she had had it. I had my suspicions aroused.

She was not the only one in the place? - No. That is quite right. Of course it is an open office in a sense. If she had to go to check goods out in the yard which the men had deposited from railway drays, there would be no one in the office, and anyone could slip in. That is what I mean by an open office.

Have you anything to connect the disappearance of the money you say you missed with this girl? - No. I have not.

Then is it fair to suggest that she was not straight? There are others in your employ? - That is quite right.

Then your suspicion was about all of them? - In a sense.

You did not suspect her more than anyone else? - No.

Then it comes to this after all, that until recently you had nothing to complain of in her conduct? - That is right.

Witness, continuing, agreed that the girl was regular, industrious, respectful, willing and truthful. Questioned as to whether it was part of her duty to handle money, he said that he was away from the office on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons, and on those occasions entrusted her with 10s in order to make small disbursements. He admitted that, in addition, she might receive money from customers who called to pay their accounts. All she would have to do would be to put "Paid" on the accounts, as there was no receipt book. He however intended to have a proper receipt book after this. Deceased should enter the amounts in the cash book.

QUESTION OF RESPONSIBILITY Witness mentioned that deceased was only the junior office clerk, and the Coroner thereupon asked why the elder girl did not receive the cash. He replied that the senior clerk had to go out and solicit orders, and to take the place of his son, who was out at the Front.

Does that mean that this child of fifteen would frequently – several times a week – be left in charge of your warehouse? - That is right. There would be nothing passing through, in a sense, only small matters that were of very little consequence. Most of the money is collected.

But still, she was left for several afternoons a week practically in charge? - Well, no, if she wanted any assistance there was a man in charge of the top room, and he could be fetched down.

She would be left in charge of the office, at any rate? - Yes, that's right.

And occasionally sums of money would pass through her hands? - Yes.

Witness at this stage produced his cash book, and referred to three items – two of £1 each and a third of 10s – which he had charged the girl with embezzling. In answer to further questions by the

Coroner, he admitted that on one afternoon the girl had received £5 14s 8d from eight different people ; on another occasion one customer paid her £6 5s.

You suggest that only infinitesimal sums passed through her hands, but added up, they would amount to several pounds a week? - I don't dispute that.

What I want to find out is what this girl of fifteen and in receipt of 7s a week had to do. Was it wise – to put it no higher – was it wise to allow money to pass through the hands of a young girl like that? - Well, I did not look at it like that. In future, I shall not allow sums of more than 1s or 1s 6d to pass through a girl's hands.

That is a matter for yourself, but do you think it was wise, what you have done? - No, I do not, now I come to think of it.

Witness, continuing, said it was on the Wednesday night he had occasion to think certain items of money had been misappropriated by deceased. He then opened the locked cash drawer, and found in it £1 less than there should have been. He afterwards made investigations, and found out the other alleged discrepancies.

AN INTERVIEW IN THE OFFICE On the Thursday morning, when the girl came to the office, witness told her the previous day's cash was short by £1. She was very indignant at the suggestion that she had had the money, and he then referred to another entry in the cash book where there was a discrepancy of £1. Deceased replied, "I admit having had that", and then burst out crying. Witness said, "It's no use crying. What have you done with the money?" She replied, "I don't know what I took it for". Witness then referred to a further entry, where he alleged a discrepancy of 10s. She said, "Yes, I took that". Witness then said, "If you have had those two other amounts, you have had this £1 as well. I want to get this cleared up. I don't want to call the police in to a young girl like you. I only want it to be a lesson to you. If you will confess that you have had this £1 and what you have done with it, then I will see your mother about it. I don't want to put you in prison". The girl still maintained she had not had the £1, and witness then said, "I will give you ten minutes to think it over and what you are going to do. If not, I will send for Burrell and see what he has to say about it". Witness added that he gave her the ten minutes, and as she still maintained that she had not had the money, he sent for Detective-sergeant Burrell. When Burrell came, he (witness) took the girl into the dining room of his house, where she still persisted in her denial that she had had the £1 which was short in respect of the previous day's cash. Witness said, "I don't want to make a Police Court job of this. If you will tell me what you have done with the £1, I will see your mother and get you reprimanded. It's not the money, but in a case like this I think an example should be made of you. If you will not confess and tell me what has become of it, I shall give you into the hands of the police". As she maintained her previous attitude, witness gave her into custody, and she then admitted having had the £1, but what had become of it she could not say. Burrell thereupon instructed him (witness) to go down to the Police Station to charge the girl, which he did.

NOTE FOUND ON THE OFFICE FLOOR Whilst they were all in the Police Office, his warehouseman, (Mr A...) came down with the news that he had found a £1 note wrapped up very tightly under the office desk.

Did that make any difference to you proceeding with the charge? - No ; I supposed she had dropped the £1 on the floor if she had not actually taken it. I should not have proceeded with the charge if I had had to come before the magistrates. I should have asked them not to sentence her.

But you were in the Police Station making the charge when this came to you? - Well, they had taken my evidence, and I had to go on with it.

Answering Mr Evans, witness said he was present in the Police Court next day when the case was mentioned, and it was stated that the girl had disappeared.

Did you speak to anybody? - I spoke to Burrell.

You did not then say you wished the case to be withdrawn? - I was not called on. I do not know the procedure of the Police Court.

At any rate, this £1 that was one of the amounts she was charged with stealing was found on your premises? - Yes.

So she never had that? - No.

The girl had been quite candid, and admitted she had had the other items, but that was not enough for you? - Certainly not.

Unless she would own up to this £1, which had somehow slipped on to the floor, she had to go? - She had to go and be publicly reprimanded. I didn't wish her to go to gaol.

Is that why you sent for the policeman – to have her publicly reprimanded? You intended her to go before the magistrates? - I intended to have her before the magistrates.

THE GIRL'S CONFESSION Having confessed to the whole lot on your promise that if she did so you would send for her mother, and would put it right, you still put her into the hands of the police? - It was nothing to do with me then ; I had sent for the police.

At all events, that is what happened? - That is quite right. I did not know what power I had. I had given her into custody, and did not know whether I could say that I would not proceed with the charge, and that the girl could be released.

By the Coroner : You did not suggest her release after you had got a confession of the three amounts? - No, I did not. I did not know what power I had got. I said to Burrell, "I simply want her reprimanded ; I don't want any penalty attached to it ; I don't wish her to go to gaol".

By Mr Evans : He did not sign the charge against the girl until the Saturday. The police locked the girl up without any charge being signed.

Then when the case came on at the Police Court, you had not signed the charge? - No.

With all these good feelings, did you say to Burrell, "I should like this case withdrawn ; I won't sign the charge now?" - No, I did not.

You have got children of your own, I suppose? - Yes.

Here is a young girl who has confessed to two faults, and you hold out a threat that if she won't own to a third, to gaol she shall go? - No, I did not.

But you said you would send for the police. Didn't you think, as a father, you ought to send for the child's father or mother? - I asked Burrell if he would see to that.

Questioned regarding the discovery of the £1 note, witness said the girl admitted having put it in her overall pocket.

Mr Evans : Do you believe for a moment that the girl did take the note?

Witness : Yes I do.

Mr Evans : Well, I should think you are the only person here who does believe it.

Witness denied that the note might have been accidentally dropped.

Mr Evans : Three or four of you get this poor little child in your dining room and, under the threat that unless she admits it she will be prosecuted, she confesses to the £1.

WITNESS'S MOTIVES Answering further questions, witness denied that he wanted the parents to refund the money ; his only object was to find out what had become of it. The girl herself, when asked how much money she had, produced 4s 3d, which the police took possession of. He had forgiven people before under similar circumstances, and he had got to make an example some time. And you chose that girl? - Yes. He denied ever asking to have the money refunded, money was not his object.

By the Coroner : The girl, when she confessed to the two items, said she had spent the money on frivolities. She admitted buying a wristlet watch for one thing. Witness said, "How did you get that wristlet watch?", and deceased replied that a friend bought it, whereupon witness remarked, "Nothing of the kind ; you must have bought it with that money".

She did not admit she bought the wristlet watch with it then? - No.

She did not admit that she had spent it on frivolity? - No.

She did not say what she had done with it? - No.

The Foreman of the Jury : She was only a child of fifteen and her wages were very small – starvation wages – are you aware of that? - in war time especially. It's not a munitions factory.

No, but it's nearly as bad. When she owned up to taking the 10s, why didn't you discharge that innocent girl – because she was innocent according to her years. You kept her because she was cheap. - No. I can get plenty of girls to do the work she was doing at 5s a week.

The Foreman : It's a mystery then.

Witness : No mystery at all.

The Foreman : If you threatened me like you did that child, you would break my nerves, old a man as I am, and I should have said, "I did take it". If you had discharged her in the first place, she would not have been where she is today.

Witness : We don't see the consequences of everything we do until afterwards. Certainly it is deplorable, this loss of life. I am sorry the thing has happened.

The Foreman : You accused her of having had the £1 note which was found on the floor. You don't know she took it, because you never saw her handle it, and very likely she never did have it, and before she would be brought into disgrace, she did this. I put the blame on you myself.

THE SUMMING UP AND VERDICT The Coroner, on summing up, said he had no doubt the impression made on the minds of the jury was the same as was made on his own mind, namely that the girl was terrorised by the feeling that she had to appear before the magistrates and have this charge preferred against her. It was true she acted foolishly in taking her own life, but when they considered what she – a young girl – had gone through that morning, though one could not excuse her conduct, one could understand it. He was not going to comment upon the evidence of the employer, except to point out that it was clear this girl, fresh from school and receiving only the small wage of 7s a week, was entrusted with duties more than one would have expected would be required of her. It was clear from the evidence that sums of considerable amounts occasionally passed through her hands. Consequently, even if the girl succumbed, the temptation was very great, and it seemed a pity – he thought Mr Morgan recognised this now – that the employer should not have contented himself with talking the matter over with the parents, or even with the girl herself, seeing what a high character he had given her. The jury could only recognise, as it was, that the threat of prosecution and the actual incarceration in the cells for a brief period so affected her mind that it became unhinged. As regarded carrying the matter any further, the evidence did not so associate the employer with what had occurred as to make him in any way the cause of the girl's death in a sense which would make him responsible, either civilly or criminally, for what had occurred. The jury's duty would, therefore, be carried out without adding to their verdict anything which in any degree associated the employer with what had happened.

The jury, without retiring, returned a verdict that deceased "drowned herself whilst of unsound mind before she could be brought into shame and disgrace". They also expressed sympathy with the parents, and in this the Coroner concurred.

51 10 November 1917

LIGHTENING THE BOATS The Rushall magistrates on Monday fined **William Henry Walker**, a boatman of Wigley's Buildings, Horseley Heath, Tipton, 20s for throwing rubbish from his boat into the canal. Inspector Martin (Canal Company) said he saw the defendant at Rushall emptying slack off his boat into the canal, the reason for this probably being that he wanted to get along quicker and was lightening the boat. Asked why slack should be called "rubbish", Inspector Martin said that was the word for it set down in the Act of Parliament. Mr W F Clark (magistrate) said it was a very valuable sort of rubbish as things were today.

At the same court, **William Philbeam**, 25 Blue Lane East, Walsall, was also fined 20s for emptying rubbish from a boat into the canal, and Inspector Martin said that the defendant told him in this case that he was making a place to walk along the boat when witness saw him shovelling slack into the water.

52 1 December 1917

DISTRICT ITEMS A boatman named **Thomas Sadler** (54), no fixed address, was at Rushall on Monday charged with stealing two fowls belonging to Ernest Meacham, a miner of Daw End, and was remanded for inquiries as to his antecedents.

53 13 April 1918

DOG AMONG THE PIGEONS William Arthur Lancaster, 56 Wolverhampton Street, was plaintiff in a case heard at the County Court on Thursday, in which he claimed £2, the value of three pigeons, from **Thomas Gill**, boatman, 93 Wolverhampton Street. Mr C L Hodgkinson, who supported the claim, said that a dog belonging to defendant came into plaintiff's yard and killed the pigeons. The dog was seen with one of the pigeons in its mouth. Defendant, on his part, contended there was only one pigeon killed, and called a witness, who said he saw the pigeon in the dog's mouth, but the other pigeons were then on the roof. The Judge awarded plaintiff £1.

54 20 April 1918

TO ESCAPE A THRASHING

WHY GREEN LANE BOY TRIED TO HANG HIMSELF In open court, at the Guildhall on Tuesday, a boy of 15, living in Upper Green Lane, was charged with attempting to commit suicide by hanging himself, and a remarkable story was told to the Bench by the Chief Constable (Mr A Thomson). He stated that on April 11 the boy had a quarrel with his father, a canal boatman, and in the evening a miner named Joseph Phipps, passing near Fishley Lane, heard a gurgling noise and found defendant suspended by a rope from the bough of a tree. Phipps released him, but he was unable to speak for some time, and had he not been found by Phipps he would have been strangled, for the bank had slipped away. The Chief Constable added that he did not propose to call evidence if the lad promised not to do such a thing again.

Defendant, who admitted having obtained from the firm for which his father worked a shilling, which he said was for his mother but which he spent in visits to picture houses, was discharged upon promising not to commit such an act again. The Bench also expressed the opinion that some blame must attach to the father.

55 17 August 1918

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT Considering that the evidence was not sufficient to justify placing defendant on trial, the magistrates at the Guildhall yesterday stopped, without calling upon the defence, a case against **Thomas Boffey**, Prince Street, Pleck, who was summoned for stealing (or alternatively receiving well knowing them to have been stolen) a pair of hames, value 9s 6d, the property of J and W Marshall Ltd, Staffordshire Iron Works. Mr H H Jackson prosecuted, and stated that the hames were safe on prosecutor's premises at 7.30 pm on August 1, but next morning **James Wood**, one of their employees, on arriving at the stable, found the door had been forced and the hames taken. On the morning of August 5, Wood was taking a boat out of Walsall when he met another boatman, **John Edwards**, employed by defendant, and noticed that the hames on the mule were similar to those he had missed. Giving evidence, Wood would not swear definitely that the hames on the mule were those taken from the stables. It was further alleged by the prosecution that defendant made contradictory explanations to Detective Ayres, but Mr R A Tench (for defendant) stated that defendant denied that, and the magistrates (Messrs A D Cozens and C F Hurst) considered that Boffey should have the benefit of the doubt.

56 12 October 1918

COAL THIEVES FINED Before Messrs J F W Binns and A W Lester at Rushall on Monday, **George Ralph** (26), bargeman, 59 Farm Street, Aston ; David Jacques (58), miner of High Street, Walsall Wood ; and Emma Cooper, a soldier's wife of High Street, Walsall Wood, were summoned for stealing coal valued 2s. Mr Cox (Messrs Bailey, Cox and Co, Birmingham) appeared for Mr F Knight, a coal merchant of Chester Street, Birmingham, the owner of the coal, and said that Police-constable Barratt saw Ralph, the boatman, take the coal and give it to Jacques, who was assisted with the coal in a garden by the woman, Mrs Cooper. The boatman said the other two had been "bumming" him for the coal, and he did not think he would be doing any harm by letting them have a cwt. The woman said she was badly off for coal. There was no excuse however for Jacques, who was a miner, because under the Fuel Order, miners were exempted from the general rule, and also

got their coal at a nominal cost. Replying to the Bench, the miner Jacques said his allowance of coal was 12 cwts a month. Mr Binns : Then you have a considerable allowance compared with other people. The magistrates considered it a serious offence, and fined Ralph and Jacques 40s each, and Mrs Cooper 10s.

>>>***<<<

57 10 January 1925

SUDDEN DEATH Respecting the death of **Thomas Micklewright** (46), canal boatman, the widow, Maria Micklewright, 186 Green Lane, stated that she was awakened at 4 o'clock that morning by his making a funny noise, and found he was unconscious. Dr Richard ascribed death, which occurred before his arrival, to valvular disease of the heart and chronic bronchitis.

58 17 January 1925

CANAL BOATMAN'S OFFENCES Numerous complaints of boatloads of coal being underweight were mentioned at Cannock Police Court on Monday, when **William Pickerell**, boatman of Bradley, Bilston, was charged with stealing 4 cwt of coal, the property of John Toole, coal factor of Bradley. **James Harris**, canal detective, said that on the morning of December 15th he saw defendant throw the coal into one of the Canal Company's clay boats as his boat was passing. Defendant admitted the offence, and said he only threw a few lumps in. Pickerell was further summoned for a contravention of the Canal Company's by laws by throwing coal into the canal. Mr E W Haden (who prosecuted in this case) explained that the Company found it necessary to have this portion of the canal near the Leacroft Colliery dredged much oftener than it should be, because boatmen threw in coal and slack. The detective said at the same time and date as mentioned in the previous case, he saw defendant throw into the canal an amount of coal which he estimated at 6 cwt. On the first charge, Pickerell was fined £1 and £1 5s costs, and on the second, £1 and 10s 6d costs, a total of £3 15s 6d.

59 17 January 1925

“PLANTED COAL?”

MOXLEY BOATMAN CHARGED WITH THEFT FROM CANAL SIDE AT DARLASTON At the Darlaston Police Court on Wednesday, **William Thomas Jones** (44), High Street, Moxley, pleaded guilty to a charge of stealing 76 lbs of coal, valued at 1s, the property of the Birmingham Canal Navigations, on January 13.

Police-constable Lawrence stated that while on duty, in company with another officer, near Baggott's Bridge at 6.40 pm the previous evening, he saw prisoner on the canal side with a bag of coal. When Jones saw witness, he dropped the bag and ran away, but was chased and eventually found hiding in a hole on the pit mound. There had been many complaints of coal stealing in the neighbourhood, and in witness's opinion, the coal had been “planted there for him”.

James Harris, canal detective, said a dredger was working near the spot, and the coal raised was stacked by the canal side. They lost a good deal through men who loitered at the bridges, awaiting a favourable opportunity to take it.

Prisoner : You're trying to accuse me of having had that coal off the bank. I know where that coal came from. It came off the same boat as me from Walsall. I am a boatman.

Witness : Then you should know the regulations, and the trouble we are put to.

Prisoner : I have got five children, and a bit of fire's half food. I am a puddler as well, but I have been out of work a long time.

The Bench dealt leniently with Jones, and put him on probation for twelve months.

60 **28 February 1925**

COAL DEALER ACQUITTED

STORY OF TRANSACTIONS IN GOODS STOLEN BY BOATMEN

CLAIMED TO HAVE PAID FULL VALUE What were described as the “amazing” transactions which John Shaw (37), coal dealer of Bell Wharf, Bell Lane, Great Barr, had with a number of canal boatmen, came before Mr Justice Salter at Stafford Assizes on Thursday. Considerable interest was shown in the case.

Shaw, who was charged with stealing goods or receiving stolen goods with the knowledge that they were stolen, was acquitted. Four other men charged with theft all pleaded guilty.

Samuel Palmer (50), 6 Foundry Street, Darlaston, was sentenced to four months' imprisonment ; **George William Mortiboy** (40), 21 Montague Street, Aston, to five months, and **John Henry Plant** (33), 52 Old Road, Ocker Hill, Tipton, to six months ; **Ernest Plant** (38), brother of the other prisoner, was bound over for six months. Mr A J Long prosecuted for the police, whilst Sir Reginald Coventry defended Shaw, and Mr H A Tucker the other prisoners. Mortiboy and Shaw were jointly charged with the theft of thirteen coal bags, the property of Thomas Herbert Coggins of Anchor Wharf, Aston, between November 1 and December 31 1924, and a further 39 bags, the property of Henry Insley and Sons, Cuckoo Bridge Wharf, Aston, between January 23 and April 1. The two Plants and Shaw were together charged with the theft of 3 tons 10 cwt of pig iron, the property of the Patent Shaft and Axle Tree Company Limited, Wednesbury, between August 31 and November 22, and also with the theft of 93 galvanised iron roofing sheets, the property of the same company, on or between January 23 and April 1. In each case, there was a second indictment against Shaw of receiving the bags, iron and roofing sheets, knowing them to have been stolen.

The first case heard was that referring to the iron sheets. John Henry Plant and Samuel Palmer pleading guilty, and John Shaw not guilty.

Mr A J Long, in prosecuting, explained to the jury that Shaw had a coal wharf alongside the canal at Great Barr, and the other defendants were canal boatmen who, in conveying coal to the Patent Axle Tree Company's premises from a colliery at Aldridge, passed Shaw's wharf once or twice a day. When the police visited the wharf on January 23, the 93 iron sheets were found in Shaw's possession. The answer he gave to the police was this : “I will be straight. I know I am guilty ; I had them from two boatmen of the Patent Shaft Company. I think one's name is Plant, the other I don't know”. Unless Shaw knew that the sheets were stolen, it was the most extraordinary answer that one could well imagine. Again, when formally charged by the police, his answer was, “I can say no more”.

Robert Forrest, works constable, employed by the Patent Shaft Company, identified the sheets by the firm's private mark. He valued them at £50, and they had been formerly lying at the works by the canal side, where a gas plant was being extended.

WON DCM IN WAR Police-sergeant Elliott said the warrant which he read over to Shaw referred to the iron sheets, a number of coal bags, a quantity of pig iron and certain motor parts. Prisoner replied, “All right ; but the motor parts I know nothing about”.

Cross-examined, witness said he was sure beyond doubt that defendant said, “I know I am guilty”. Witness was aware that defendant had a very distinguished career in the Army, rising to the position of staff sergeant and winning the DCM.

Shaw, in the witness box, said that he joined the Army in 1907, and later managed a farm for his father before taking over the wharf in April 1924. He bought the articles referred to from two boatmen from time to time, believing each to be a perfectly honest transaction. Unfortunately, he had found out since that the things were stolen property. He paid the men 2s 6d per sheet for the corrugated iron, considering that to be a fair price. The shed in which the sheets were found was an open shed, where the cattle sheltered. The sheets were not hidden, but could be seen from the canal or an adjacent recreation ground. The men brought about twenty at a time at intervals of a couple of days. When Plant first came to ask if he wanted some sheets, he thought he was an ordinary business man. He did not ask his name or whom he worked for. The sheets were placed on the wharf, but he himself never saw Plant with a boat. He did not find that the boatmen worked for the

Patent Shaft Co until he had bought all the sheets, and then he asked other boatmen the names of the two men.

His Lordship : Why did you ask the names?

Defendant : Just out of curiosity.

Replying further to Mr Long, defendant said it never occurred to him that there was anything queer about the deal. When he was told the men were boatmen working for the Patent Axle Co, he thought they might be men owning their own horses. He never realised there was anything wrong until the police came to his premises. On the 3 tons 7 cwt of pig iron, he made a profit of only 2s 6d a ton. This iron he found placed on the wharf, but he did not know how it arrived. He was frequently away from the wharf all day. Plant had previously said that he had some "scrap" to sell.

ASKED TO BUY SCRAP IRON His Lordship : You had bought and paid for 93 sheets of iron, and do I understand this man came to you and asked you to buy some scrap iron?

Prisoner : Yes. I told him I wasn't particular, but afterwards he delivered some.

Was anything said about the price? - Yes. He was to bring all he had, and I was to pay £2 per ton.

And you never asked him whom he was, where he came from, or for whom he was working? - No.

Prisoner went on to refer to the coal sacks, and said that when asked by Mortiboy if he wanted any, he at first said, "No". Eventually he bought about 50 bags, paying from 2s 6d to 3s each for them. After examining these bags, he came to the conclusion that he had paid more for them than they were worth. He believed this man brought the bags by boat, but it never struck him as peculiar. Referring to the arrival of the police with a search warrant, prisoner agreed that he understood he was about to have a serious charge preferred against him, and he gave every possible assistance to the officers.

Mr Long : Did you reply, "I will be straight. I know I am guilty".

Prisoner : No. The policeman said, "You be straight with me and I'll be straight with you".

Did you say, "I know I am guilty"? - No. I never said that. I deny that emphatically. He added that he did not know the police sergeant, and he could not account for such a statement having been made.

Replying to Sir Reginald Coventry, prisoner said that Plant appeared to be a straight, open fellow, and he entered into the transaction with a perfectly clear conscience.

Mr William Henry South, retired bank manager of Gorway Road, Walsall, and Alderman W J Pearman-Smith of Walsall both gave accused an excellent character.

Mr Long, addressing the jury, asked them if they had ever heard such an extraordinary story as that put forward by prisoner. The goods continued to arrive, and he never asked where they came from. What could they think of that?

"KNAVE OR FOOL?" Sir Reginald Coventry said the question for the jury was really whether Shaw was a knave or a fool who had been imposed upon. In such a case, it was important that they should look at a prisoner's history. They had heard of his distinguished career in the Army and he both came of a respectable family and had been a respectable man all his life. He was just the type of man who, had he known these things were not come by honestly, would have at once informed the police. In such a case, the price given for the goods was important, and even the prosecution had not suggested that the corrugated iron was worth more than he paid for it. The same thing applied to the iron and, so far as the bags went, he held that he had actually paid more for them than they were worth.

All that was in favour of the prisoner and indicated that he was unaware the goods were stolen property. He had protested his innocence all along. It was said that he admitted the theft, but he (the speaker) suggested that this was a misunderstanding on the part of the police-sergeant. No doubt the sergeant believed the statement was made, but there was a good deal of conversation going on at the time, and it was possible the sergeant did not hear everything. Had the sergeant written the words down in the book, which he was provided with by the community for that purpose, and shown it to the prisoner at the time, then there would not have been the slightest doubt about it. Obviously Plant would not say that the stuff was stolen, for in disposing of such material a thief had either to go to an old receiver, who would beat the price down, or look for some new

“mug”. The prosecution had made much of the fact that the coal bags were purchased from another man, but everyone who had given a coin to a beggar knew what happened and, of course, in the case of the boatmen they told one another.

His Lordship said the case called for the very serious consideration of the jury, and the broad question was whether the prisoner bought the goods knowing, either at first or afterwards, that they were not honestly come by.

“Not Guilty” was the verdict returned by the jury against Shaw, and as the prosecution offered no further evidence in the other charges, similar findings were returned, and Shaw was discharged.

61 2 May 1925

LOVERS' SUICIDE PACT

WALSALL MAN AND CANNOCK GIRL DROWNED TOGETHER

“WE SHALL SOON BE TOGETHER” The courtship of a pair of Cannock lovers, who were scarcely more than boy and girl, had a tragic ending on Wednesday night, and in the early hours of Thursday morning their bodies were recovered from the canal about half a mile from Leacroft Bridge, midway between Cannock and Hednesford. The young people were Florence Nickless (18), whose parents live at Foster's Buildings, Pye Green Road, Cannock, and Fred Smith (21), a young miner, who was a native of Walsall, but who had lived in lodgings in Pye Green. They had been courting for several years, and were seen together about eight o'clock on Thursday (*Wednesday???*) night, but failed to return to their respective homes.

Early on Thursday morning, two Bradley boatmen found a girl's hat and a man's jacket and cap on the side of the canal, and promptly acquainted the Hednesford police of their discovery. Inspector Dale and several constables went to the place indicated, and recovered the bodies from the water just after seven o'clock.

Enquiries into the cause behind the tragedy reveal an infinitely sad story. Miss Nickless had up to a few months ago held a position as a domestic servant in Manchester, but her health had broken down after an attack of influenza. As a girl she regularly attended the Broomhill Mission Sunday School, and all who knew her speak most highly of her. Smith, whose house was formerly in Walhouse Street, Walsall, was a pony driver in the pit, and it was stated that, as the result of an accident with which he met two years ago, he had lost the use of his right arm. It was while he was employed as a driver at the East Cannock Colliery in February 1921 that his shoulder was crushed between the horse and a pit prop, and he was several months in hospital. Friends say that he had brooded a good deal over the effect his serious injury was likely to have on his future.

Letters, which threw a direct light on the action of the pair, were produced at the inquest conducted by Mr W Morgan at the Cannock Council Chambers yesterday afternoon. Smith had left three letters, addressed in separate envelopes. In the one to his sister, Mrs Jellyman of 10 Brick kiln Street, Brownhills, he wrote :

FAREWELL LETTERS “Dear Sister, - I hope you are now on the road to complete recovery ; also that this act of mine won't upset you very much, having told you that I had decided to end it all. I do hope it won't hit you so hard as it would otherwise. Perhaps, knowing all, you will understand and forgive me. I told Florrie, as you know, and asked her to give me up, but she refused. I told her what I was going to do, and she said that if I did it she would also. Oh, God knows how I have tried to persuade her to hang on to life, but it is no use ; she is bent on it, and I am saying nothing more.

I know that you would do anything for me, but, little sister, if this is the coward's way out, I should be a much bigger coward if I became a burden to anyone. We are not doing this without considering everything, and we decided over a week ago. We have nine packets of salts of lemon which we shall take between us, and if that does not do it, we shall finish by drowning. I close hoping that you will forgive us”.

In similar terms was the letter which Florence Nickless had addressed to her mother, and which was dated April 29. She wrote :

“My dear Mother – Please forgive me the misery I am about to cause you, but I am writing this letter to wish you all goodbye. I never guessed that life could be so uninteresting at nineteen. You

already know that Fred had nothing to look forward to in the future, so we have decided that the sooner we leave this world the better. We have both the happy consolation of knowing that we shall soon be reunited with the dear departed.

Please, dear mother, don't blame or let others blame Fred for this, for, as God is my witness, I am doing it of my own free will. Fred thinks this is the only way out for him, as he does not wish to be a burden to anyone, and I feel I should not be doing my duty if I let him go alone. I hope everyone will forgive me for this. With all my love, your ever loving Florrie”.

The girl, it may be mentioned, lost a soldier brother during the war, and also a brother, a schoolboy, to whom she was deeply attached, little more than a year ago.

Giving evidence of identification, Mrs Jellyman said that her brother had become very depressed and had told her he feared his arm would never be any better. The letters addressed to her and two others were in her brother's handwriting.

Mrs John Nickless, also giving evidence of identification, said her daughter had been keeping company with Smith for several months. She had to leave her situation as a domestic servant about three months ago on account of a severe attack of influenza.

IN TERRIBLE PAIN Mrs Hannah Beeson of Pye Green Road stated that Smith had lodged with her for about four years. After his injury, he was given light work at the Colliery, but after a few weeks he had to give up and was unable to work for nine months. He tried again, but still found he could not continue. In the meantime he was attending hospital at both Wolverhampton and Birmingham. The muscles of his arm were all gone, and the limb appeared to be wasting. He often complained that he was in terrible pain. He became more and more depressed, and had frequently of late said he was “fed up”.

In reply to Police-inspector Dale, witness said that she noticed Smith writing several letters on the Wednesday afternoon.

Miss Lucy Bould of 43 Mill Street, Cannock, a friend of Miss Nickless, said that both the girl and Smith called at her home on Wednesday evening, and did not seem then depressed, but quite their usual selves.

Asked if she had heard either of the pair threaten to commit suicide, the witness replied, “Well, about a week ago, she told me she had a great secret to tell me if I would not tell anyone. She told me about her young man, and that they had decided to end it together”. “Of course, I did not take what she said seriously”, added witness, “but I told her not to think of doing anything of the kind”.

A boatman named **Thomas Stevens** of Hatton Street, Bradley, spoke to finding the girl's hat and the man's cap and jacket on the towing-path.

Police-constable Cartlidge stated that the bodies were recovered from the water at 8.15 on Thursday morning. The clothing was in no way disarranged, and the girl was wearing a pair of gloves, properly buttoned up. There was no sign of a struggle having taken place. The letters produced were found in the pocket of the man's coat.

The Coroner said it was clear that the young couple had got into a very sad and depressed state of mind. He always hesitated in such cases to produce any correspondence that might have been left behind, but in these two instances the letters had thrown a great amount of light on the circumstances. His verdict would be that the pair committed suicide by drowning whilst temporarily of unsound mind.

62 23 May 1925

COAL FOR CIGARETTES An instance of the practice of tipping coal off canal boats on to the towing-path in exchange for cigarettes was given in a case heard at Willenhall Police Court on Monday, when **George Rupert Meese** (25), boatman of 62 Salop Street, Bradley, was charged with stealing 2 cwt of coal belonging to his employers, Messrs John Toole Ltd, Bradley ; and Alice Cattell (27), married, of Canal Side, near Bentley Wharf, Bentley, was charged with aiding and abetting. **James Harris**, a detective employed by the canal company, said that in consequence of complaints, he concealed himself near Bentley Wharf in some bushes close to Cattell's house. He saw Meese throw about 2 cwt of coal off his boat, and Cattell handed something to him. When

spoken to, Meese said he had a child ill and could not afford the money for cigarettes, so he threw off two lumps of coal, for which Cattell gave him a packet of "Woodbines". Meese, it was stated, would probably be dismissed by his employers. Defendants were fined 40s each, and Meese also had to pay 5s 6d costs on a summons for throwing coal into the canal.

63 30 May 1925

BETRAYED BY QUACKING

BIRMINGHAM BOATMEN FOUND IN POSSESSION OF STOLEN DUCKS One dead duck, with its neck broken, and another alive, were "exhibits" in a case at Rushall Police Court on Monday, when two Birmingham boatmen, **Benjamin Law** (42) of back 23 Hunter's Vale, Hockley, and **Charles Smith**, 12 back 33, Lower Tower Street, were charged with stealing the two birds, which were the property of **William Sedgwick** of Old Forge Road, Pelsall, and were valued at £1, at Pelsall on May 22.

Emma Sedgwick, wife of the owner, who is a canal boat loader, identified the birds, and said she last saw them alive on the canal near her house on Friday May 22. At 8.30 pm the same day they were missing, and she gave information to the police at Bloxwich.

Police-constable Smith, stationed at Bloxwich, said that in consequence of a complaint from the previous witness, he visited a canal boat moored near the Barley Mow at Goscote, and spoke to the prisoners, who told him to clear off. Hearing a duck quacking, however, he sent for assistance, and with Police-constable Allcock searched the cabin, where they found the two ducks, one being dead with its neck broken. Smith then said the one got caught between the boat and the lock at Dudley, and the other one flew on to the boat.

Addressing the Bench, Smith asked for a week's adjournment in order that they might be legally represented, but when Police-constables Smith and Allcock stated that they could produce a witness who saw accused capture the ducks, the men asked to be dealt with immediately. They were fined 40s each, and were also ordered to pay between them 5s as the value of the dead bird.

Thanks to the Walsall police for their assistance in the case were expressed by Police Superintendent Sault. The prisoners had previously the same morning appeared at Walsall Police Court.

64 30 May 1925

LANDLORD NOT RESPONSIBLE "You cannot live in a house without paying rent", said Judge Tebbs in the Walsall County Court on Wednesday to the wife of **Thomas Lyons**, when Ralph Hardcastle (infant), son of Ernest Hardcastle of Green Rock House, Blakenhall, applied for possession of the house occupied by Lyons on the ground that defendant was £15 11s 7d in arrears of rent. Mr A Cotterell, for applicant, said Lyons had been given an opportunity to pay, but had missed for ten consecutive weeks, although they were obtaining 32s weekly from the Employment Exchange. Defendant's wife said her husband was a boatman on the dole. They had ten children, two of whom were working. The Judge : Everyone is sorry for you if you have no money. But you can't expect Mr Hardcastle to help to keep you. It is not his fault that you have ten children and your husband is out of work. His Honour granted an order for possession within seven days, not to be enforced so long as defendant paid 6s 1d rent and 11 per cent weekly towards the arrears. "Even at that rate", added the Judge, "it will take seven or eight years to clear off the arrears. If your husband obtains work, he will have to pay more".

65 11 July 1925

THE OBLIGING BOATMAN When **Samuel Warwick**, an Oldbury boatman, was summoned at the Brownhills Police Court on Wednesday for throwing coal into the canal at Newtown on June 28th, **James Harris**, a canal detective, said he saw defendant throw about a hundredweight of coal, some into the canal and some into rushes near the bank. That which fell in the rushes was taken by a woman, who said she asked defendant to get her a bit of coal, and defendant eventually admitted this was true. He was fined 30s.

66 12 September 1925

“TIDYING THE BOAT UP”

WALSALL BOATMAN'S EXCUSE FOR SHOVELLING SLACK OVERBOARD A Walsall boatman, **Joseph Ralph**, back of 34 Upper Green Lane, summoned at the Brownhills Police Court on Wednesday for throwing coal slack into the canal and for leaving his horse unattended on the towing path, did not appear when his name was called twice during the hearing. When witnesses for the prosecution had all given their evidence, however, he turned up, with the remark that he was “across the road” when his name was called. He pleaded not guilty and, as a result, the whole of the evidence had to be repeated again in order that he might cross-examine the witnesses.

Mr A F Griffin, who prosecuted, said that on Wednesday August 19 at about 5.30 pm, Sergeant O'Hara, from the bridge over the Birmingham Canal, Burntwood Road, noticed defendant shovelling coal screenings into the water, and this continued while the boat travelled a distance of 80 yards. Defendant had no one in charge of his horse. The canal company had difficulty in bringing these cases home to offenders, said Mr Griffin. The dredging and cleansing of their waterways was an expensive matter for them, and it was easily understood how men who behaved like defendant increased the difficulty. The only explanation, he suggested, for defendant's conduct was that he was being paid by the trip, and it would thus be in his own interests to lighten the load and so expedite his journey.

Sergeant O'Hara said nearly half a hundredweight left his boat every time defendant used his shovel. When spoken to, he said he was “only tidying up the boat”, but witness pointed out that he could have done this quite effectively by putting the slack forward.

John Greatrex, a watchman employed by the Cannock Chase Colliery Company, who corroborated, said defendant threw about half a ton of slack into the canal.

Defendant told the Bench he was trimming the boat, but shovelled no coal into the canal. “You can't avoid knocking a cobble or two off as you walk along the boat”, he added.

“This throwing of coal into the canal must cease”, commented the presiding magistrate (Mr W G Leckie), in fining defendant 10s in each case, and ordering him to pay the costs.

67 31 October 1925

HORSE AND MOTOR CYCLE

CORPORATION'S UNSUCCESSFUL CLAIM FOR DAMAGES AGAINST BUTCHER The Walsall Corporation failed in an action which they brought in the Walsall County Court against Richard Keay, butcher of Birmingham Street, whom they sued for £5 3s 6d for damages to a motor cycle alleged to have been caused by defendant's negligent driving of a horse and trap.

The accident, said Mr A V Haden (who appeared for the Corporation) occurred at 5.15 pm on Friday January 30. A foreman in the Corporation Gas Department, Mr Percy Cuss of 13 Rutter Street, was, in the course of his duties, riding a motor cycle across the Bridge, having been signalled to do so by the policeman on point duty, and when by the Dora Cafe, it was alleged, defendant's pony ran into him from the rear and injured the motor cyclist and damaged the machine. The defendant's horse cut in between the cyclist and the pavement on the near side.

Cuss, in evidence, said the horse's head came over his shoulder, and the shaft caught in witness's belt and dragged him off. He was hurt and the machine damaged. When asked why he had cut in on the near side, defendant said the horse bolted and he could not help it.

Defendant, who was not legally represented, said Cuss cut in beneath the pony's head and touched it on the nose, causing it to bolt into St Paul's Street. “I could not hold it”, said defendant.

Cuss denied that he touched the horse, and said he was always in front of it.

Joseph Robinson, a boatman of Holloway Bank, Wednesbury, said the defendant's horse shied at the Bloxwich tramcar. He thought defendant could have avoided the accident if he had not lost his nerve.

Asked if he had any witnesses, defendant replied, “Only the policeman on point duty”.

The Judge : Where is he?

Defendant : He isn't here.

The Judge : That doesn't help us much.

Mr Haden said the constable – Police-constable Allen – had told him he could not help in the case.

Defendant : I saw him a week ago, and he said he had heard from the Court, but would not tell me anything. Defendant added that the policeman had told him it was a pure accident.

When it was stated that the policeman took notes about the accident, the Judge said it would have been much better if the officer had been called.

Summing up, the Judge said the case failed because the plaintiffs had not proved how the accident occurred. If it was true that the horse shied at the tram, there was no negligence.

His Honour gave judgement for the defendant.

68 7 November 1925

SIMPLY TRIMMING UP THE BOAT A Winson Green boatman, **George Alfred Farley**, appeared at the Cannock Police Court on Monday, summoned for throwing slack into the canal at Leacroft on Friday October 9, and for leaving his horse unattended on the same date. It was stated that defendant was seen by **James Harris**, a canal detective, and Joseph Aston, a check gauger, throwing 22 shovels of coal into the canal, amounting to 5 or 6 cwt. There were many complaints of shortage, and such offences were very difficult to detect. For the defence it was contended that, when gauged at its destination, the boat registered 20 tons, the same as when it left the Hednesford basin, and that as there was no shortage there could be no offence. Farley said he was simply trimming up the boat and a little slack might have fallen into the canal, but not much. He had been a boatman for 41 years. It was a physical impossibility to remain with the horse during the whole of a trip. The Bench imposed a fine of 20s for throwing the slack into the canal, and ordered the payment of 5s 6d costs on the other summons. **William Banner**, a Tipton boatman, had to pay like amounts for summonses on similar offences.

69 7 November 1925

GILLITY CANAL TRAGEDY

BOATMAN'S GRIM REPLY TO CORONER'S QUESTION

MAN WHO RAN AWAY A hat and stick carefully placed one on top of the other several feet from the water's edge formed the evidence which led the Walsall Coroner (Mr J P Addison) to conclude, at an enquiry he conducted at the Guildhall on Monday afternoon, that there were no accidental circumstances about the death of George Cownley (78), an old age pensioner, whose body was found in the canal at Gillity on the previous Friday afternoon.

The deceased's widow, Sarah Jane Cownley, 10 Eldon Street, stated that her husband – who was formerly a journeyman carpenter – had been weak and feeble of late, and also suffered from a very bad cough. He usually went for a walk in the afternoon, being away sometimes for two hours, and on Friday he went out at ten minutes past three.

“Was there anything which had worried him lately?”, asked the Coroner.

Witness : Yes, he had seemed worried because he was poorly, and he said he was getting near sighted. He was also troubled about his cough.

Had he any other troubles? None that I know of, but he had begun to be childish, and would myther.

Had you ever heard him say anything about taking his own life? No, sir, never. He was always a good husband.

How the body was discovered at about 4.15 on Friday afternoon was told by **Thomas Stevens**, a boatman of Fairview, Cyprus Street, Oldbury, who said he was passing under the bridge at Gillity when he saw a hat and stick on the towing-path. His suspicions being aroused, he halted his horse, and was about to make a search when the body floated to the surface. He got it to the towing-path, and concluding that death had taken place, covered the face with a sack, went on to the Longwood Locks, and from there cycled to the police station and reported the matter.

MAN WHO HAS SEEN MANY CORPSES “You acted with great dispatch”, commented the Coroner, “but what makes you say the man was dead?”

“Well, sir, I have seen so many, “ was the witness's reply. The man's hat and stick, he added, were placed four or five feet from the water's edge, and the hat was lying on the stick.

Police-constable Wigmore, who conveyed the body to the mortuary and searched the clothing, stated that only a handkerchief, a pen knife and a medical card were found in the pockets.

Mr James Francis O'Mahoney, *locum tenens* for Dr Dixon, said he had attended Cownley, who was suffering more or less from senile decay. Witness saw him on Friday morning, when he seemed more worried than usual.

The Coroner : He had been worried before?

Witness : Yes, about the state of his health, but he was more depressed on Friday morning. He said he was worried about things at home, that his children were not strong, and that his daughter was not at all well.

Recalled, and asked whether anyone else was about when he discovered the body, the boatman said, “There was a man in the field, but when I asked him to stay and mind the body, he said he was frightened, and ran away”.

Returning a verdict that death was due to drowning, and that Cownley took his own life while of unsound mind, the Coroner said he would have been disposed to return an open verdict but for the position in which the stick and hat were found on the towing-path.

70 9 January 1926

WALSALL BABY MYSTERY

BODY IN BROWN PAPER PARCEL FOUND FLOATING IN CANAL The Walsall police are endeavouring to clear up the mystery surrounding the discovery in the canal near Coalpool Bridge on Tuesday afternoon of the body of a newly born female child, wrapped in a brown paper parcel. This was found floating on the water by **Thomas Webster**, a boatman of 24 Port Street, who told the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the inquest held at the Guildhall on Thursday morning that he did not think it had been totally submerged, as the top of it was quite dry. On cutting the outer string, he came to another sheet of brown paper also tied up, and inside that there was a third wrapping of brown paper. He added that there was no one within sight when he discovered the parcel, and he had not met anyone on the towing path.

Dr O'Meara, who made a *post mortem* examination, said the body was fully developed and in a perfect state of preservation. There was air in the lungs, proving that it must have breathed, but he thought it could have lived only a very short time – probably not more than a few seconds. There were no marks of violence, and in his opinion the sole cause of death, which appeared to have taken place only an hour or two before the parcel was found, was inattention at birth.

The Coroner returned a verdict accordingly, and said he hoped the police would succeed in finding out something concerning the parentage of the child.

71 30 January 1926

ONLY A SHOVELFUL OR TWO

CANAL BOATMAN PAYS DEARLY FOR LIGHTENING HIS LOAD “I was only just clearing the slack off the fore beam and throwing it into the ladehole”, was the excuse given by **Stephen Cox**, a Great Bridge canal boatman, when summoned at the Cannock Police Court on Monday for having thrown slack into the canal at Leacroft on January 5. Mr Bickley (Birmingham) appeared on defendant's behalf, and denied the offence.

Mr Frank Cooper, prosecuting for the Canal Company, said the defendant was seen to shovel a quantity of slack into the water and, at the time, did not dispute that he had done so. As the Bench were well aware, this sort of offence was a serious matter for the company, for this was a busy stretch of water, and was very difficult to keep open. Moreover, it was grossly unfair to traders who did not get fuel they paid for, and it was unfair to those conscientious boatmen who, not thus lightening their loads, could not complete their journeys so speedily.

James Harris, a Canal Company detective, and a ganger named Joseph Ashton, gave evidence to the effect that while at the Park Bridge they saw the defendant shovel three or four hundredweight

of coal from the fore part of the boat into the canal. They stopped the boat and showed the defendant the coal dust still floating on the water. Defendant then said, "You need not tell Mr Matty. I only put a shovelful or two in".

In reply to Mr Bickley, the witness Harris agrees that defendant had been trimming the load just previously, but said this slack was deliberately shovelled into the water. He was not aware that any complaint had been made that this boat was short weight on arrival at its destination and, in fact, by ways best known to the bargees, it "might have been a ton over".

Defendant was ordered to pay a 40s fine.

72 27 February 1926

A BOATMAN'S BOAST

BENCH DO NOT CREDIT CLAIM THAT HE NEVER SHOVELLED COAL OVERBOARD A somewhat remarkable claim was advanced by a Dudley boatman named **Harry Houghton** at the Cannock Police Court, when he avowed that, while he was born on a canal boat and had followed the occupation of boatman for more than forty years, he had never deliberately shovelled fuel overboard. Together with another Dudley boatman named **George Edgington**, he was summoned for such an offence at Leacroft on January 29.

Mr E W Haden, who prosecuted for the Canal Company, spoke of the loss caused to coal buying firms, and the expenses involved in dredging the canal as the result of this practice.

Edgington admitted the charge against him, and Detective Harris stated that, hidden in the gorse near Kingswood Bridge, he saw this man "push" with a shovel five or six cwt of coal into the water. It was further stated that Houghton, jumping off the boat, had shouted to Edgington, "We want a bit more off the cabin end". He denied that he had shovelled any coal off, but admitted that some might have gone over "by accident".

The men were each ordered to pay a fine of 40s, with 2s 6d special costs.

73 1 May 1926

BALANCING OR LIGHTENING?

BOATMAN'S REPLY TO CHARGE OF THROWING COAL OVERBOARD How a boatman was caught throwing slack into the canal between Daw End and Longwood was told at the Rushall Police Court on Monday, when the Birmingham Canal Navigations summoned **John Golding** (46) of Cuckoo Cottages, Cuckoo Road, Aston, for the offence. He pleaded not guilty to this, and guilty to a second summons for leaving his horse unattended on the towing-path.

Prosecuting, Mr Frank Cooper explained that defendant was employed by Messrs Element, haulage contractors of Hockley, Birmingham, to convey a boat laden with fuel from the Aldridge Colliery to the Birmingham Electricity Works. When near Riddians's Bridge on April 19, he was seen by a canal detective shovelling slack from the boat into the water. Presumably this was with the object of lightening the boat, so that he could get along faster. It was very unfair to the firm who had ordered the fuel, and unfair to the Canal Company, seeing that it blocked the channel. There had been frequent similar prosecutions in the district, so that the offence was well known to boatmen.

James Harris, canal detective, said he saw defendant throw 14 shovelfuls of slack into the canal, and estimated that the weight would be about 4 cwt. When spoken to about it, defendant said, "It is the first time I have done it, and I hope you will overlook it. I won't do it again. I have got a wife and children, and they have been bad. You can give me a chance this time". Defendant's mate said, "He hasn't put above 2 cwt off".

Defendant said the detective had told a lot of lies. It was against his interest to throw slack into the canal, seeing that the more weight he carried, the more money he got. He was merely shovelling the slack into the middle of the boat because it was not upright and would not pass through the locks. The detective said the boat was running evenly.

The Bench fined Golding 40s for throwing off the slack, and 5s for leaving the horse unattended.

74 24 July 1926

BOATMAN BLAMES PALS A Birchills canal boatman, **Joseph King** (45), 7 Thomas Street, pleaded guilty before the Walsall magistrates on Wednesday to being drunk and incapable in Wolverhampton Road on Monday night, Police-constable Allen stating that he found him in a helpless condition at Parkbrook and took him to the lock up for his own safety. King, who said he was very sorry and promised that such a thing would never occur again, stated, in reply to the Chairman (Mr F T Cozens) that he was out of work. The Magistrates' Clerk (Mr S E Loxton) : Well, where did you get the money from? Defendant : I met a few pals, and that's the cause of it, but it will never occur again. Not having been previously in trouble, King was discharged with a caution.

75 7 August 1926

HOW A CYCLE DISAPPEARED An Oldbury boatman, **Thomas Russell** (22) of Fat Bank Road, and a boy of 12, living in the same road, appeared before the Walsall magistrates yesterday in answer to summonses jointly charging them with stealing a bicycle, valued at 20s, the property of Joseph Sly, aged 19, of Balls Street, Walsall. When cycling along the canal towing-path on July 23, Sly had occasion to go into a field near the Red House, Sutton Road, and when he returned, about fifteen minutes later, the cycle had disappeared. It had been "found", according to the story now told by defendants, by the boy, who was in a boat with Russell, but although in the neighbourhood of Great Bridge they passed some policemen who were escorting traffic, they did not report the "find". Russell, when subsequently seen at his home by Detective (?Evington), at first said he knew nothing about the bicycle ; but afterwards he produced the detached mudguards, while the boy brought the bicycle from his home. The Bench fined Russell 20s, and placed the boy on probation for twelve months.

76 2 October 1926

A PLUCKY POLICEWOMAN

STUCK TO VIOLENT PRISONER WHO BRUTALLY ASSAULTED HER How she was severely bitten in a struggle with a canal boatman was described by Miss Winifred McLintic, one of Walsall's two policewomen, to the magistrates at Walsall Guildhall on Monday, when **Joseph Hicklin** (54), 8 Navigation Street, was charged with assaulting her.

Miss McLintic stated that about 8.25 on Saturday night, she saw prisoner and a woman behaving indecently in Midland Road. Crossing the street, she told them she should arrest them, taking the woman with the right hand and the man with the left. Hicklin, however, struck her a blow on the chest that caused her to reel against the wall and loosen her hold on the woman, who escaped. "I tackled Hicklin", proceeded the policewoman, "and although he struggled violently and bit my hand, I managed to get him round the corner, where a gentleman came out of a house and assisted me. Prisoner continued to struggle violently, and bit my fingers until they bled, and he also kicked me on the ankles. A little further along, he pushed me against a telegraph post, but we did not let him go, and when he found he could not get away, he went quietly". Witness added that she had to have her fingers cauterised.

In reply to the Chief Constable, she said prisoner was much the worse for drink.

Prisoner denied that he was with the woman, but beyond several times asking the policewoman to show whether she had any bruises on her legs, he had nothing to say about the assault.

Sentencing Hicklin to three months' hard labour, the Chairman (Mr W Abbotts) told him he had committed a brutal assault.

77 26 February 1927

"FOUND DROWNED"

BODY OF WORKHOUSE INMATE RECOVERED FROM THE CANAL An inmate of the Walsall Guardians institution since 1912, Thomas Garroway (77), at one time a brown saddler who was well known in the town, disappeared on Tuesday of last week, and his dead body was

recovered from the canal near Wolverhampton Street on Tuesday morning.

At the inquest held by the Borough Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the Guildhall on Wednesday, George Wolsey, charge attendant in the infirm ward, living in Campden Street, said on Tuesday of last week Garroway complained that he did not feel well, and witness advised him to go to bed. At 12.45 he took him his dinner and Garroway was then in bed, but at 1.20, when he went up with the doctor, the man had disappeared. At 7.30 pm the same day, he saw Garroway in Wolverhampton Street, but he did not question him as to why he had left the institution. He thought he had obtained a pass from the master and was making his way back. He was a very cheerful man, and not in the least likely, in his opinion, to take his own life.

John Richard Evans, boatman, 29 Rowland Street, spoke to seeing the body in the canal on Tuesday morning, and Dr J F O'Meara stated that death was due to drowning, and the body had probably been in the water for several days.

Remarking that death might have been due to a pure accident, as there was no evidence to show how the man came to be in the water, the Coroner returned an open verdict of "Found drowned".

78 19 March 1927

TWO MEN WANTED When **Horace Selby** (26), boatman, 95 Old Birchills, was charged with being concerned with two other men not in custody in stealing 2 1/2 cwt of coal, the property of some person or persons unknown, the Chief Constable said he wanted to get the other two men in the dock with Selby if possible. He therefore applied for a remand, but did not object to bail. Accused was remanded for a week in a surety of £10.

79 26 March 1927

COAL THIEVES SENT TO PRISON **Horace Selby** (26), boatman, 9 Old Birchills ; Frank Coleman (31), cupola hand, Old Birchills, and **John Whittaker** (27), boatman, 30 Short Acre Street, pleaded guilty to stealing 2 1/2 cwt of coal, value 4s 6d, the property of the Corporation Electricity Department, on March 15. Police-constable Bennett saw the men on the canal bank with three sacks, which they put down as he approached. When questioned, they said they were coming from work, but he told them that he was not satisfied with that reply, and they then ran away. He caught Selby, who became so violent that he had to be handcuffed.

All the men pleaded that they were out of work, and Coleman said he had a wife and two children ill, and had no fire.

Whittaker, against whom there were ten previous convictions, was sentenced to two months' hard labour, and Selby and Coleman to one month each.

80 30 April 1927

A STOLEN TOW ROPE Stated to be sleeping in an old disused boat at Woodward's dock, and a boatman by trade, **Samuel Round** (22) of Daw End was charged with the theft of a tow rope, the property of Arthur George Gardiner, coal dealer of Lichfield Road, Rushall, at the Olympic Wharf, Daw End. Gardiner said the rope, which was worth 10s 6d, was taken from a garage on the wharf between April 19th and April 20th, and he reported the matter to the police. Police-constable Steele said he made enquiries and saw prisoner at Woodward's Dock. Round at first denied that he knew anything about the tow rope, but later said it had been thrown into his boat by a passing boatman, who told him to say nothing about it. When cautioned and charged with the theft however, he admitted that he took the rope from the Olympic Wharf in Winterley Lane. Prisoner was not in regular employment, said witness, but made his home in the cabin of a boat and did odd jobs about the dock. He had been in the district about 18 months, and was a native of Tipton. Round was put under the care of the Probation Officer for two years.

81 12 November 1927

STATION THIEF CAUGHT Seen to take parcels from a barrow at New Street Station on October 28, **Isaiah Moorcroft** (26), boatman of 26 Alma Street, Walsall, was at Birmingham Police Court

on Thursday fined £3. His excuse to the Stipendiary was that at the time he was under the influence of drink.

82 14 January 1928

CANAL BOATMEN'S LANGUAGE "It is the usual boatmen's language", pleaded Mr Frank Platt, appearing for **Frank Gouldingay** (37), boatman of Vaughton Street, Birmingham, who was summoned for using scurrilous, abusive or threatening language to an officer of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Ltd on December 15. "Well", remarked the Clerk, after evidence of the language had been given, "it ought not to be the usual language of anybody". It appeared that defendant took exception to his boat being checked by one of the company's officials at Birchills Locks on the day in question, and used bad language near a house where the lock-keeper's wife and children were. Defendant was fined 20s with 1s special costs.

83 17 March 1928

OLD AGE PENSIONER'S DEATH A verdict of death from heart failure following chronic bronchitis was returned by the Walsall Coroner (Mr J F Addison) at the Guildhall on Thursday, regarding **Thomas Challoner** (75) of 100 Wolverhampton Street, who, on going to bed on Tuesday night, was taken ill and began to gasp. His daughter, Mrs Elizabeth Hickman of Francis Street, went for medical aid, but before the arrival of Dr R C Pratt the old man had passed away. Challoner was an old age pensioner, and formerly a boatman.

84 21 April 1928

LONELY MAN'S DEATH An inquest was held at the Bloxwich Police Station on Tuesday by Mr J H S Addison (Coroner's Deputy) concerning the death of **Samuel Higgins** (75), retired boatman of 6 house, 3 Court, Sheyd Lane, Bloxwich, who was found by neighbours dead in bed on Monday afternoon. It was stated that he lived entirely alone, and was of a very reserved disposition. Dr Stuart said death was due to fibrous degeneration of the heart, hastened by bronchitis, and a verdict in accordance with this evidence was returned.

85 14 July 1928

CANAL COAL THEFTS

TWO BOATMEN AND TWO WALSALL WOOD WOMEN FINED The transfer of coal from a canal boat to coalhouses adjoining the towing-path at Walsall Wood on May 26 led to **Arthur Cross** (29), boatman, 31 Prestbury Road, Aston, and **Alfred Roadknight** (25), boatman, 24 Great Lister Street, Aston, being summoned for stealing six hundredweight, valued at 6s, the property of Dixon, Edwards and Co of Birmingham, and Mary Male (35) and Lily Lavina While (42), both of Walsall Road, Walsall Wood, were summoned for receiving the coal, well knowing that it was stolen.

Police-constable Warrington said he kept observation on a boat moored near the rear of the Travellers' Rest Inn, Walsall Wood, and he saw Cross hand lumps of coal from the boat to Roadknight, who was on the towing-path. Roadknight went across and handed the coal over an iron fence to the female defendants. Cross told witness, "The woman was going to give us a loaf for it". Mrs Male, who was caught hiding in Mrs While's coalhouse, said, "I was only going to give them a bit of sugar and a loaf for it". Roadknight later told him he wished to make a clean breast, and said one of the women gave him a shilling.

Mr D Hurst (barrister), for Cross, said the only explanation he could suggest was that the men were in want of a meal, and defendants also said they had been delayed at the colliery and had no money until they got home.

Both women pleaded not guilty, and while admitting that they had the coal, denied that they knew it was stolen. Mrs Male said she thought the coal was allowed the men for their own use.

Cross and Roadknight were fined £2 each, and the women £1 each.

86 24 November 1928

WHY A CHARGE COLLAPSED Frederick Wilding, 13 Beacon View, Goscote, was charged with the theft of 2s worth of coal, the property of the Langley Forge Co, Wednesbury. **Ernest Wilcox**, a Langley boatman, said that when Wilding asked him for coal he told him to keep off the boat, but Wilding jumped on and threw the coal on to the towing-path. Neither he nor his mate gave him the coal. Police-constable Stretton said he saw accused coming from the towing-path with coal, and he said the boatman gave it him. The Chief Constable said there had been many complaints of coal stealing at Goscote Bridge.

Wilding pleaded guilty, but stuck to his story that the coal was given to him by the boatman. Police-constable Stretton, recalled in reply to Mr Abbots, said the boatman admitted to him (witness) that he gave Wilding the coal. The Clerk : That puts a different complexion on it. Without comment, the Bench dismissed the case.

87 3 August 1929

MOXLEY DROWNING FATALITY A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned by Mr J H S Addison, the District Coroner's Deputy, at an inquest held at the Darlaston Town Hall yesterday afternoon on Mary Ackwood (7), the daughter of a Stourbridge man, who had been staying with her grandmother at 27 Church Street, Moxley. The evidence showed that the child went out to play in Darby's Fields on Thursday afternoon, and sometime afterwards, **Thomas Henry Nock**, canal boatman, was informed that she was in the canal, and he recovered the body, but life was extinct. Police-constable Smith stated that one of the other children told him, "Mary went to the canal to get a fish and fell in, and I ran home frightened".

88 24 August 1929

LIVING HORSE SKELETON

THE POOREST ANIMAL VETERINARY SURGEON HAS EVER SEEN The Walsall Magistrates – Messrs A D Cozens (presiding), S Sanders, R E Ledbury and A C Fraser Wood and Miss Windle – heard yesterday from Mr A E Paley, veterinary surgeon, a description of the terrible condition of a horse, in respect of which John Gilbert (35), 13 Upper Green Lane, and George Henry Mercer (42), 5 Lichfield Road, co-partners in a local firm, were summoned for causing it unnecessary suffering by omitting to give it proper attention.

"It was", said Mr Paley, "the poorest animal I have ever seen in my life".

Both defendants pleaded not guilty, and Mercer was represented by Mr A Victor Haden.

Police-sergeant Lavender stated that on August 6 he received a complaint about a horse that had been seen going along Mellish Road, and after examining it, he called in Mr Paley.

John Wood, Upper Green Lane, a boatman, said he was taking the horse along Mellish Road when a lady stopped him and told him it was a disgrace to walk it on the road.

Mr Paley described the horse as practically a living skeleton, and said he ordered its immediate slaughter. It was impossible for it to graze so as to get a living. On making a *post mortem* examination, he found that there was no trace of fat at all. The spleen contained three tumours, and the liver was in a semi rotten condition. A number of teeth were missing from the upper jaw, leaving cavities which the lower teeth had grown into, rendering the animal totally unable to masticate its food. It had to swallow just what got past the teeth, and it must have taken months to being about such a condition. The animal was from twenty to twenty five years old, and totally unfit to live.

Mercer told him he had not seen the horse previous to the attention of the police being called to it. There were four other horses, one of which was poor and the others not in good condition but passable, and Mercer instructed him to give them proper treatment. Griffiths informed him that he had been away for three weeks.

Mercer, giving evidence, said he was a director of an engineering company at Oldbury, and he joined Griffiths six years ago as a sleeping partner, leaving the care of the business entirely to Griffiths. Recently, however, owing to the unsatisfactory financial position, there had been a

suggestion that the partnership should be dissolved, as from August 1st last, and that he should take over the steerage side of the business, including the horses, Griffiths retaining the scrap and marine stores. In view of that, he made arrangements for the horses to be put out to hay, but he did not examine them because he had not the slightest doubt that Griffiths had looked after them properly.

Griffiths, making a statement not on oath, said Mercer was an active partner, and drew 20s a week from the business, besides half the profits. The horse in question worked for a fortnight or three weeks after it was bought in May, and then he kept it up because of its condition, thinking it would get all right. He had not seen it for three weeks before it was sent to ley.

In reply to the Chairman, Griffiths said he believed he gave 17 guineas for the horse.

The magistrates retired, and on their return the Chairman said they thought it was a shocking case. They did not consider there had been proper supervision over the horses. Griffiths would be fined £15 and Mercer £5.

In reply to a question by Mr Haden, Mr S E Loxton (Justices' Clerk) said the magistrates did not consider that Mercer had in any way permitted the ill-treatment of the animal, but he had failed to exercise reasonable care and supervision. No doubt he would have stopped it at once if he had known what was going on.

Griffiths was also ordered to pay £2 7s costs, the Chairman remarking that he had only just missed being sent to gaol without the option of a fine.

89 7 December 1929

BOATMAN IN A HURRY That he “did draw a clough, sluice or paddle before the gates of a lock were closed” at the Longwood Locks of the Birmingham Canal Navigations, was the summons to which **William Bowen**, an Oldbury boatman, pleaded guilty. The effect of his action was to cause a rush of water into the lock, which might have led to serious damage to the gates. He stated that he flushed the boat through because he was in a hurry. The first case of its kind to come before the Bench, payment of 5s costs was ordered.

90 14 December 1929

BOTHER OVER BOAT

RUSHALL MAN SUCCEEDS IN CLAIM AGAINST COAL MERCHANT A Rushall boat builder, Peter Key of Winterley Dock, Daw End, was the plaintiff in an action at Walsall County Court on Wednesday, James Wellings, coal merchant of Millfields near Wolverhampton being sued for £7, representing the balance of an account for repairs to a canal boat.

Mr J D Evans appeared for plaintiff, who stated that in December of last year, defendant sent a boat to be overhauled and repaired. The work cost £13, but defendant had paid only £6.

Wellings, who conducted his own defence, told Judge Tebbs that all along he had complained that the work was not done satisfactorily. The boat let water in very fast.

Plaintiff agreed that defendant had made these complaints, but added, “The strange thing was that whenever I went to defendant's wharf to see the boat, I was told the men had just finished bailing the water out”. Subsequently he (plaintiff) and an independent witness saw the boat near Wolverhampton, and making an examination, could not see any traces of leaking.

Thomas Sedgwick, boat builder of The Wood, Pelsall, corroborated this evidence of an inspection of the boat near Wolverhampton, but defendant's boatman, **John Foxley**, who was in charge of the boat at the time, told the Judge that plaintiff and his companion examined only the fore end, whereas the leakage was at the stern, where there was a heavier load.

His Honour gave judgement for plaintiff, with costs.