

Transcript of a report of the inquest into the death of Alfred Mould
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Sad death of Royal Naval Reserve Man

Mr. Hacker held an inquest at Dawlish Monday evening on Alfred Mould, Naval Reservist, who on Saturday was found lying on the railway, about three parts of a mile east of Dawlish Station, suffering from severe injuries to which he succumbed a few hours later in the Cottage Hospital. Chief Inspector J Mapledoram, Exeter, represented the Great Western Railway Company.

Reginald Walter King, ship's corporal Royal Naval Barracks, Devonport, gave evidence of identification and said deceased was 24 years of age and that he entered the service in April, 1912. He was married, his home being 29, Edgar Street, Birkenhead. He was called up for service last August, since which he had been at Devonport. He obtained 48 hours leave from October 10th to 12th to go home to see his wife, who had been confined and there had been no extension of leave. Deceased did not return on the 12th and in consequence he was entered in the log as an ordinary absentee and his description was given out, he being liable for arrest. What purported to be a document giving deceased leave from October 11th to the 14th and which was found on the body was produced and witness said he did not recognise it as an extension of leave; it might be forged, but he had been unable to ascertain that this was so. The document was signed "John Reed," which might be the skipper of a trawler, who, however, had no authority to sign it. So far as the naval authorities at Devonport were concerned, deceased's leave expired at 7 a.m. on the 12th. A seaman could only get leave for one night from the master of a trawler; he had no authority to give leave to a man to leave the port. By that (Monday) morning, after a lapse of seven days, deceased would have been gazetted as a deserter. He would have been liable to detention punishment as an absentee.

William Stanley Crispin of Starcross, said that about 12.45 p.m. on Saturday, whilst walking on the "Ladies Mile" with his father and brother, he saw a down train pass and noticed that a carriage door was open. He told his father.

Harold B Crispin, brother of the last witness, said that their dog turned out a rabbit and on going down over the cliff to see if the dog caught it, he saw the body of a man dressed in naval uniform lying in the six foot way between the lines. He was breathing but unconscious and lying near him were his coat and an open cigarette case with cigarettes about and also a return half of a railway ticket from Birkenhead to Devonport. Witness moved the man's foot off the line and beckoned to his father and they moved the man to the grass by the side of the line.

Dr. Montagu Cutcliffe said when he first saw deceased on the side of the line he was unconscious and in a very collapsed condition. The ambulance men and witness had him moved to the hospital, where he was treated. There was an external wound on the back of his head and a compound fracture of the skull. There was also a lacerated wound on the right forearm. Deceased never regained consciousness and died about four o' clock the same afternoon. The cause of death was fracture of the skull and haemorrhage. The wound on the head was such as would have been caused by the man pitching on his head and struck some prominent projection such as a bolt of a sleeper. Witness noticed nothing to indicate that deceased had been drinking.

P.C. Shapland gave evidence of assisting to bring deceased to the hospital. Upon him was a halfpenny and a private letter written some time since. Seventeen yards above the spot where deceased was picked up there was some disturbance of the ground on the line and six feet from these marks on one of the bolts of the sleeper on the up line there was some hair and blood. Nine yards further on there was more blood on the sleepers and on the stones and still more blood where deceased was found. His trousers were torn.

Jethro Chubb, guard of the train, said it was an express and left Exeter at 12.43. There were several naval men on the train, but he could not identify deceased nor was his attention directed to him at any point on the line. The men were well behaved and there were no complaints. He knew nothing of the occurrence and did not know when the carriage door was opened. The first he heard of it was after he arrived at Plymouth.

William George Horrel, ticket collector, Dawlish, also gave evidence, as did Samuel George Webber, carriage examiner at St. David's Station, Exeter, who said all the carriage doors were properly closed when it left.

Inspector Mapledoram said he found a depression in the loose ballast as if a man had fallen or jumped out on his feet and six yards farther on towards Dawlish he saw blood on the sleepers and more towards and on the spot where deceased was picked up.

He thought the man was carried the 15 yards by turning a somersault two or three times owing to impetus and speed of the train, which was going from 36 to 40 miles an hour.

The coroner stated that the letter found on deceased bore the postmark of October 9th and was from deceased's wife at Birkenhead and addressed to him at the Royal Naval Barracks, Devonport. There was nothing in the letter to throw any light on the occurrence. Summing up, the coroner said deceased had overstayed his leave, but whether the extension leave was a dodge of his own to excuse himself or not did not matter. Had he not been killed he would have been back in Devonport in time to save himself from being a deserter. As to whether there was enough evidence to justify the idea that deceased jumped out of the train to take his life, it would be stretching matters a good deal to say that there was sufficient motive to cause him to commit such a deed.

The jury (of whom William Ferris was the foreman) returned a verdict of "Accidental death" and affirmed that there was no blame attached to anyone.

The funeral of the deceased took place on Thursday, a detachment of the R.A.M.C. in the town attending and a number of them acting as bearers. The G.W.R. Co. sent a wreath.