

## **Robert Charles Radford – Accidental Death 1911**

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Graham Davies, October 2019.

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### **The Lyme Regis Fatality – Inquest and Verdict**

Mr C G Nantes, coroner for West Dorset, held an inquest at Haydn House<sup>(1)</sup>, Broad Street, Lyme Regis, on Friday morning, on the body of Robert Charles Radford, of the firm of Messrs Radford & Radford, auctioneers and house furnishers, who was killed by the bursting of a cannon on Coronation day.<sup>(2)</sup>

Mr George Henley was foreman of the jury.

Evidence of identification was given by Mr Robert Guy Radford, son of deceased, who stated that his father was 48 years of age. Witness said he last saw his father alive on Whit-Tuesday. Questioned by the Coroner, witness said he lived at Exeter, and knew nothing about the tragic accident.

Charles Henry Alfred White, licensee of the Three Cups Hotel, Broad Street, stated that about 5.45 am on Thursday he was awakened from his sleep by a loud report. Witness looked out of his bedroom window, and saw Mr Radford. He also heard Mr Camplin speaking. They appeared to be the only two men in the street. Shortly afterwards witness heard another report, and, as he was rather annoyed, he called out to deceased about the noise created by the firing of a cannon. Deceased was then intently looking at some object in the road, and with the same there was a terrific explosion. Stones seemed to fly in the air in all directions. Witness noticed Mr Radford stagger, and thereupon fall to the ground. Mr Camplin, who appeared to be somewhat dazed, went towards deceased, crying out "Doctor, doctor." Witness next saw members of the Town Band arrive on the scene and Mr Radford was conveyed into his residence, Haydn House. Replying to the Coroner, witness said he could not see the cannon from his window, but when the explosion occurred something seemed to strike deceased.

Harold Munro Emmett, a member of the Town Band, stated that as he was coming up Broad Street with other members of the band on Thursday morning, he heard the report of a cannon. Witness saw Mr Camplin, who was standing about a yard from the pavement, suddenly run across the street to render assistance to Mr Radford, who was injured, and was lying in the gutter. Mr Camplin beckoned to witness to hasten to the spot. On arrival witness assisted in removing Mr Radford to his house. Two doctors were summoned, and some boy scouts ran to fetch the matron of the Cottage Hospital. As witness was coming up the street a large piece of the cannon flew past him, and dropped near Mr Randall's shop, a distance of about 40 yards from the scene of the accident.

Albert Ambrose Loud, butcher, of Broad Street, stated that on Thursday morning, while he was looking at the decorations on his premises, he saw Mr Camplin fire a small cannon in a passage on Mr Radford's premises. Witness then went on the verandah of his house, and his brother-in-law remarked, "Here they come with a bigger cannon." Witness thereupon went indoors, and almost instantly there was a loud report. On looking up the street witness saw Mr Radford lying on the ground.

Samuel Govier, blacksmith, of Broad Street, who was on the jury, stated that he first saw Messrs Radford and Camplin bring into the street a small brass cannon, which they fired. Afterwards the two men brought out the cannon which was the cause of the accident. This cannon, which was about two feet in length, was placed in the middle of the street, with the muzzle pointing up the hill. The cannon was loaded before it was brought into the street. Witness at the time was standing on a ladder which was against his house, and when the explosion occurred, he was nearly knocked off the ladder. On looking round witness saw Mr Radford fall into the gutter alongside the street. The cannon was fired by a fuse attached to a stick.

Similar evidence was given by P S Thomas, who added that Mr Camplin was too ill to attend the inquest. Witness had seen Mr Camplin at his house, and the latter stated that he was in the act of firing the cannon when it burst.

Answering the Coroner, witness said Mr Camplin was working under the directions of Mr Radford.

Dr H J Cooper, medical practitioner, of Lyme Regis, stated that when he arrived at Haydn House, he found Mr Radford lying on the floor of the front room, with his wife supporting him. There was a large gaping wound on the left side of Mr Radford's body. Mr Radford was semi-conscious when witness first saw him, but he gradually became unconscious, and died after seven o'clock.

The Coroner, in reviewing the evidence, said the apparent cause of the unfortunate occurrence was through using an old cannon which was not fit to be used. There was no blame attached to anyone except the men themselves. It was an awful sad accident to happen on a day<sup>(1)</sup> which was to have been one of general rejoicing. He was sure that the widow and family would have not only the sympathy of the jury and himself, but also that of the whole of the townspeople in their sad bereavement.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death"

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<sup>(1)</sup> Haydn house is No.19 Broad Street.

<sup>(2)</sup> The accident occurred on Thursday, June 22, 1911, the Coronation day of King George V and Queen Mary.