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PROCEEDINGS of INQUEST

held upon the body of

William Sumner

at

Stoke Newington

Received at the Crown Law Offices,

M 12 - 189

S

R. Ford J.P. Coroner

Magisterial Inquiry

A Magisterial Inquiry on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen taken at Hopton in the Western Bailiwick of Victoria this 6th day of December 1895 before the undersigned Robert Ford Esquire one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the said Bailiwick upon view of the body of William Cumming then and there lying dead.

Having duly inquired when, where, how and by what means the said William Cumming came by his death, I say that the said William Cumming died at Hopton in the said Bailiwick on the 6th day of December 1895 from taking a dose of strychnine, self administered whilst in a state of temporary insanity.

As witness my hand this 6th day of December 1895.

Robert Ford JP

This Deponent Mary Byrne
on her oath swears as follows
I am a laundress in the em-
ploy of Mr. Lascelles Lake
Carrington Station. I know
the deceased. To the best of
my belief I last saw the
deceased at about 8 pm on
the evening of the 5th inst
in the garden in the front of
the house. I sleep in the
same part of the house as the
deceased, during the night I
heard a door slamming which
I think ^{was} it was between
three and four o'clock in the
morning. Some time afterwards
I heard some one moaning,
shortly afterwards again I heard
a scream and some one say
"merciful God" I thought it was
deceased's voice. I then called
Mr Campbell and said I think
Mr Cunningham is all.

Mary Byrne

Taken and sworn
before me this 6th
day of December, 1898.

John Ford J.P.

This deponent Mare Campbell
 on her oath says as follows:
 I am the wife of William
 Campbell Sheep Overseer at the
 Lake Carroll Station, I am
 also housekeeper for the
 deceased W. Cummins.

I remember Mary Payne the
 last witness calling me this
 morning at about a quarter past
 five, she came into my room
 and said Mr Cummins was very
 ill and asked me to go in and
 see him, I went to his room
 I found the door open, and his
 clothes all scattered about the
 room, the window curtain torn
 down a glass broken on the
 floor and a candle stick also
 on the floor, I saw deceased lying
 on the bed with his face towards
 the wall, I asked him if he was
 ill, he turned his face to me
 and shook his head but did
 not speak, I then went & called
 Mr. Foster who returned with
 me to deceased's bedroom,
 he was then struggling on the bed
 & appeared to be in pain. When I was
 cleaning up the room I noticed a bottle
 on the mantel piece I noticed it con-
 tained a white crystallised substance
 which Mr Foster told me was
 strychnine, I then sent a messenger
 for the doctor. I last saw the

deceased at about 8 p.m. last night, he was then reading on the veranda. I did not notice anything peculiar about him at that time. He has been ill since last Monday ^{and} last. He has been taking very little food up till yesterday when he appeared to have a better appetite. I never heard him say that he was tired of his life or threatened to commit suicide.

M. Campbell

Taken and sworn
before me this 6th day
of December 1895.

John W. Ford J.P.

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This deponent Jose Riches Foster
on his oath & oath as follows
I am a farm manager for Mr.
Lascelles Lake Cowling Station
I have known the deceased
Mr Cummins over two and a half
years. I last saw him at 11.30
last night outside Mr. Lascelles's
office he seemed to be in ~~his usual~~
better health & spirits than he
had been for the last few days.
I was called this morning by Mrs
Campbell at about half past five
she said "Mr. Cummins is very ill
Come down at once" I went to
deceased's bedroom followed by
Mrs Campbell. Deceased was on
the bed facing the window.
I noticed the floor was in disorder
I asked him was he in pain he
looked at me & shook his head
he tried to speak but was unable
to. he appeared to be in convulsions
I got hold of him & tried to keep him
steady. When Mrs Campbell re-
turned to the room after sending
for the doctor she drew my attention
to a small bottle on the mantel
piece & asked me what was in it.
I looked at it & immediately
saw it was strychnine.
There is a quantity of strychnine
kept on the station for the
purpose of poisoning rabbits

I am therefore well acquainted with the appearance of it. I asked Mrs Campbell to at once get some Mustard & Water which I gave him as an emetic. he opened his mouth as if he were willing to take it, it took no effect, & deceased gave a sort of convulsive gasp, fell back and expired. Last Tuesday Morning I heard him say he was tired of his life, I have also heard him say that he wished he could sleep the sleep of the just - I know that he suffered from Insomnia and had on different occasions taken sleeping draughts.

I know no reason why he should have taken his life & he always led me to believe he was in a fairly good financial position.

J. Siches M.D.

Reexamined. When I saw the bottle of Strychnine it was uncorbed, & the label off I did not know deceased had the Strychnine, it was kept in the store under his charge.

J. Siches M.D.

Taken and sworn before me this 6th day of December 1895-

Robert J. Cook M.P.

This deponent Edward Harwood Casselles on his oath & oath as follows. I am a wool broker and land owner. I know the deceased he was in my employ as the Manager of the Lake Cowong Station for nearly three years, and previous to that I had known him for about 17 years. On Wednesday morning last I came up from Geelong previous to coming up I had heard Mr. Cummins was not well & hardly in a fit state to attend to his duties. On my arrival here I was told by Mr. Garrard that Mr. Cummins was ~~not~~ ^{not} well enough to see me, but in the evening he Mr. Garrard came to my house & said "Mr. Cummins is now well enough to see you" I went into deceased's bedroom & found him sitting on his bed, he said I know what you have come to see me about & I desire to tell you that my nerves have been quite upset so much so that I have made up my mind to resign my position & but for the advice of others I would have sent in a letter of resignation last week he said the responsibilities of his position were too great & that he suffered very much

from Tussonnia. I said that I was very sorry and would accept his resignation.

We had a very amicable talk about matters concerning the Station & he arranged to stay on till about the New Year, when I said I expected a new manager I asked him his plans & he said he meant to take a long sea voyage. At the close of our interview he seemed quite cheerful & there was not the smallest sign that he intended taking his life.

I saw him twice on the next day & talked over business with him & he seemed to be in good health and spirits. The next I heard of deceased was at 6 o'clock this morning from Mr Foster ^{who} informing me that he was dead. I believe deceased is about 60 years of age & has been to my own knowledge about 25 years in the Colony.

J. W. Hascelles }

Taken and sworn before me
this 6th day of December 1895

John Ford J.P.

This deponent James Charles
 Weld on his oath says as
 follows I am a legally qualified
 Medical practitioner practicing
 at Hopetown. I last saw ^{deceased} ~~the~~
 above yesterday morning at
 about half past nine; he was
 sitting on the verandah, he
 was in fairly good spirits
 but nervous. I have been
 attending regularly since
 Tuesday morning last he
 was then suffering from insomnia
 & was in very low spirits and
 expressed himself as being tired
 of his life at that time I
 prescribed some soothing
 medicine for him & again in
 the evening. On the following day
 he seemed better & I again gave
 him a soothing draught in the
 evening. Yesterday he appeared
 to be better but still sleepless.
 I prescribed a tonic & a sleeping
 draught in the evening.
 At a quarter to nine this morning
 I was sent for to see him and
 when I arrived he was dead.
 I have known deceased for about
 two years and have known him
 occasionally to suffer from insomnia
 when he was always very depressed
 I have been at times ^{been} afraid that
 he would make an attempt.

(21)
to take his life as I have
at times heard him express
himself to the effect. that
P.S. "when ~~he~~ had lost the confidence
of his fellow creatures he had
better be dead.

On Tuesday I warned Mr. Foster
& Mr. Garrard that it would be
necessary to watch the deceased
as he may make an attempt on
his life. When I came into
deceased's room this morning
I was shown a bottle & was
satisfied that it contained
strychnine.

J. Charles Weld

Yalben and sworn before me
this 6th day of December 1895

Robert Ford J.P.

This deponent on his oath saith my name is Alfred Smelcher Police Constable in Charge of the Hopetown Police Station. I know the deceased William Cunningham I last saw alive about 11 o'clock last night he came to the police ^{Station} to see me on business. I walked about with him for half an hour, he appeared in good health and spirits and spoke quite rationally. There was nothing in his demeanour to lead me to suppose that he intended taking his life. This morning about 6 o'clock I was called by Dr. Weld to come to the Station as Mr. Cunningham was dead. When I got there I was shown a bottle containing ^{which I was positive of} Strychnine also a broken glass. There was not so far as I could judge any sediment in the bottom of the glass. I have known the deceased for the past two years and never had any reason to think he would attempt his life.

Alfred Smelcher

Taken and sworn before me
the 6th day of December 1895

John Ford J.P.