

Dean Forest Mercury,

Friday, February 5, 1915

Burning Fatality

Terrible occurrence at Lydbrook.

Four Persons Injured

Two Deaths

The coroner's Inquiry.

A shocking accident occurred at Upper Lydbrook early on Wednesday evening, at the residence of Mr Hubert Taylor, collier, in consequences of which four persons were injured and one has succumbed. It appears that at seven o'clock there were in the house two daughters, named Gladys and Edith, aged respectively about 18 and six years, their Grandmother (mother of Mrs Taylor). Mrs Ann Phelps and a young man named Archie Taylor, a friend but not a relation of the family. From particulars we have gleamed, it appears that by some means an oil lamp standing on the table in the kitchen was upset, and immediately there was a conflagration, and all four persons mentioned were injured, the two girls very badly. The young man did all that was possible to rescue the others and put out the flames. The elder girl, with her clothes on fire, rushed out of the room. The furniture became involved,

and there was a scene of much excitement. The Grandmother was badly burnt, and the shock in her case was that serious she was in a critical condition. The younger child was so badly injured that her case appeared hopeless, and she died some hours later. The structure of the house was saved, but the furniture was damaged and widows broken. Neighbours were quickly at hand, and everything possible was done to deal with the situation and to assuage the sufferings of the people who had been injured. They were as soon as possible removed to a relatives house (Mr Oliver Phelps's) near. Drs Bennett and Applegate attended to their injuries, and Mr Harold Smith was waiting in his motor car in case it was thought advisable or possible to remove either of the patients to Gloucester Infirmary or Monmouth Hospital. At the time of the occurrence Mr Taylor was not at home, and Mrs Taylor was carrying out caretaking duties at the Baptist Chapel. Further information shows that before the old lady could be removed the interior of the room was in flames, and great pluck was shown by Mr Oliver Phelps and Mr Arthur Christian in getting into the house and rescuing Mrs Phelps, who however, passed away on Friday morning.

The inquest

Mr J W Guise, the Coroner for the Forest-of-Dean, Division, attended at the Primitive Methodist schoolroom, Lydbrook, on Friday afternoon, and held an inquiry into the death of the two victims of the terrible burning fatality on Wednesday evening. Their names were Mrs Ann Phelps and Edith Phyllis Taylor, the six year old daughter of Hubert Taylor.

The foreman of the jury was Mr. John Dudley.

At the outset the Coroner said the jury was called together that afternoon to enquire into the very sad incident indeed related to the death of a child named Edith Phyllis Taylor aged six and, and Mrs

Ann Phelps, who was aged 82. The Coroner proceeded to read the police report, and then called evidence.

The first witness was Hubert Taylor, a collier, working at Trafalgar, who stated he resided at Lydbrook, the deceased, Edith Phyllis Taylor, was his daughter, and he identified the body. She was six years of age. Witness was not at the house at the time of the accident, but returned home about 7.20.

The Coroner: What did you find?

Witness: I found the place was a total wreck.

Witness said he was fetched to the house by Harry Mann. The child had been carried up to the house of Mr Oliver Phelps. He saw her. She appeared to be seriously injured, and she died at 2.15 the next morning. Dr Bennett was already attending the child when he arrived.

Oliver Phelps deposed he was a son of the diseased Mrs Phelps, who was 82 years of age. He identified her body. She resided with the last witness. On the evening in question, about 7 o'clock, he was standing at his door, about 50 yards from the Taylor's, when he saw Gladys Taylor, who was now in Gloucester Infirmary, come running up the road in flames. He pulled his jacket off and wrapped it around her. After seeing she was being attended to he went down to Taylor's house and found it so full of smoke he could not get in. He broke the window and got inside, and Arthur Christian picked up the old lady and carried her to the house next door. She died at 7.15 on Friday morning.

Thomas Archibald Taylor, of Lower Lydbrook, Collier, who's both hands were swathed in bandages, stated that on Wednesday, the third inst; he was at the house of Mrs Taylor. The accident happened about seven o'clock. There were in the room Mrs Gladys Taylor, Edith Phyllis Taylor (deceased) and Mrs Ann Phelps (the grandmother), also deceased.

The Coroner: Now, what happened?

Witness: Phyllis was sitting on the stool in front of the fire, and on getting up put her foot on the stool to get on the table.

The Coroner: What did she want to get on the table for?

Witness: I do not know. In doing so the stool slipped away, and she fell backwards, clutching the table lamp to save herself. By so doing the lamp was pulled over on top of her.

The Coroner: What was it-- a paraffin lamp?

Witness: Yes, sir.

The Coroner: What happened next?

Witness: The flames from the lamp went all over her.

The Coroner: She was alight all over her?

Witness: Yes sir, Miss Gladys Taylor picked her up and was trying to get her from there when she set herself on fire. When she found herself on fire she dropped the youngster and commenced running about. I looked about to see what I could put on her, and I found a man's coat, and with it tried to suffocate the flames on the child. It partly helped to extinguish the flames. I could not find anything else to hand, so I went outside and got a bucket of water and threw it over her, and that put it out.

The Coroner: What became of the old lady? When did she catch fire?

Witness: I don't know.

Witness added the child was taken next door and the Doctor was sent for.

The Coroner: Don't you know anything about the burning of the old lady at all?

Witness: I went back and tried to get her out, but the flames were too much for me.

Arthur Christian, of Harry Hill storekeeper at Mr. Harold Smith's explosive factory, stated that at about 7.15pm on Wednesday evening he was returning from work. He was passing Mr. Taylor's house when he saw a good deal of smoke coming from it, and the widow in flames.

The Coroner: What did you do?

Witness: I got off the bike and went to the house. I saw Mr Archie Taylor outside. I next saw Mr Oliver Phelps, who was endeavouring to go into the house.

The smoke prevented him. We both tried again, and were able to

get in. Mr Phelps wrapped something around his mouth, and after breaking the window we both got in and carried Mrs Phelps out.

The Coroner: How was she lying?

Witness: She was lying in front of the fireplace on the floor near the table.

The Coroner: Was she conscious?

Witness: Yes she was asking for help.

The Coroner: What happened then?

Witness: I picked her up and took her in next door.

The Coroner: Did you notice any injuries to her?

Witness: Her hands and face were burnt and her one wrist was cut.

Witness added he rendered first aid, and Doctor Bennett, who had been sent for, soon appeared.

Amelia Jones, wife of John Jones, deposed that on the evening of the 3rd. inst at 7.20. She was fetched to the house of Mr. Oliver Phelps. On arriving there she found Phyllis Taylor on the floor badly burned and unconscious. Gladys was also there and was also badly burned. Witness assisted the doctor in bandaging the burns, and remained with the girl until she died. Death took place at 7.15 on Friday morning.

Dr. Ed. Bennett, Lydbrook, deposed he was called about 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday evening to the house of Mr Oliver Phelps. He found Phyllis and Gladys Taylor there, as well as Archie Taylor. He found Edith Phyllis Taylor in a dying condition, her injuries being caused apparently by burns, which extended over the face, neck, arms and legs. He gave her a hypodermic of strychnine and dressed the wounds. She was unconscious. Next witness went to a neighbour's house and saw the deceased Ann Phelps she was conscious, but was severely burned on the face, both arms, and one foot. He treated her. The cause of death in both cases was shock, occasioned by the burns.

The foreman: Everything possible was done that could be done?

The Doctor: I think so.

The Coroner, briefly Summing up, said the facts were both simple and sad. Everything appeared to have been done that was possible,

and the conduct of those men who endeavoured to get into the house through the flames and smoke was very credible indeed. Nothing more could be more so. He was sure the jury would like to be associated with him in sympathising with the families of the deceased persons. He suggested the jury should return a verdict that both died from shock occasioned by burns accidentally received. The foreman having said that the jury desired to be associated with the remarks of the Corner, a verdict was returned in accordance with the Corner's suggestion.