

## Inquest of Patience Lily Butler

Gun fatality at Stickney 1896 A boy shoots a girl of 11

An inquest was held on Monday afternoon at the **Dog and Duck Inn**, Stickney, before the District Coroner Walter Clegg JP MD with reference to the death of Lily Patience Butler who was shot with a gun by Walter William Holmes a boy of 11 years on the previous day. From the talk in the village our representative gathered that the girl who was employed by Mr Holmes as a nurse, had been reprimanded on Saturday for stealing apples from the orchard. The jury was composed as follows;-

James Christopher Foster (foreman) Rowland Smith, Samuel Butler, Walmsley Anderson, Thomas Lawson, Eardley Jepson, Thomas Harker, Thomas Weightman, Richard Wallhead, John Sykes, William Lovell and George Donner.

The Coroner said; You all know, gentlemen, why you are all here. It is to inquire into the painful death of a child named Lily Patience Butler, 12 years of age who met her death from a gunshot wound. You have to inquire how and in what way that wound was inflicted, whether it was accidental, or whether you have reason to blame any person. After viewing the body the jury returned.

William Clarke, farm servant in the employment of Mr James Lawson, said he was on the bank on Sunday about half-past five going to fetch the cows. He saw the boy Holmes put up the gun and fire it. He held up the gun and shot it off just as witness got there. Witness was near the barn corner at the time. The girl came out of the orchard directly after the shot. She was crying and with one hand to her breast. Witness did not know the girl was there until the boy fired and the girl ran out. Deceased was stooping down. When she appeared Holmes said "Has it hurt you Lily" but the deceased did not reply. She came about five yards out of the orchard and then put both hands over the railing to hold herself up. She fell upon the rail, and dropped to the ground. Witness did not go to her; he kept on the bank. He saw Holmes go into the house and fetch his father and mother, and the father

carried the girl to the house, no one else came. Witness had not seen Holmes since that time. He met him that afternoon for the first time since the incident. He did not see any quarrelling. He did not see the girl go into the orchard.

Dr Moxham stated that he was called between four and five o'clock on the previous day to see a girl who they told him had been shot with a gun. He went and saw the girl. She was lying on the sofa in the parlour. She had about a dozen corns in her breast and one had penetrated her right eyeball. The shots in the chest were not in one place they had caused several wounds. The shot in the eye had in all probability penetrated the brain. The deceased was in an unconscious state when he arrived, and she lived about a quarter of a hour. The gunshot wounds were undoubtedly the cause of death.

Frank Holmes father of the boy who shot deceased. Said it was just tea time on Sunday when he heard the gun go off. The gun was his property and had been placed on some hooks at the top of the kitchen. It was loaded and capped. He last used it three weeks ago and he had loaded it and put it on the hooks which was the place he usually kept it. He never left it capped, but he was harvesting when he put it there and he had forgotten to take the cap off. Witness had never known the boy to touch the gun before and had never had to caution him not to take it down , and it never occurred to him when he put it in that position that the boy would meddle with it. His son would be obliged to get a chair to get the gun down. The boy and girl were on good terms. There had never been any word or quarrel between them.

William Walter Homes was the next witness. He was sobbing and appeared to be very much affected. Before taking his evidence the Coroner warned him that if he said anything it would be taken down in writing and might be used against him in a court of law. If he knew he had done anything wrong he need not give any evidence. The boy however said he wished to tell them how it happened. He stated that on Sunday afternoon between four and five o'clock, he was in the house with Lily. They had had no quarrel. The girl went out in to the orchard to get some apples. He then took down the gun and went outside. He called out to her "There's

a blackbird at the apples” and the gun went off. He was sure he not pull the trigger, but struck the gun on top off the rail. He was quite certain that he never touched the trigger, but he pulled the cock up.

The gun was handed round for examination. It was an old fashioned muzzle-loader and had an exceedingly strong spring. Several jurors expressed the opinion that the lad had endeavoured to pull the hammer to full cock, but had not quite done so, and the hammer had slipped through his fingers.

The Coroner said he did not think he need detain the jury with further evidence. They had all the facts before them. There had been no previous quarrel and the boy had evidently taken the gun down for a lark.

The jury returned a verdict of “Accidental Death” The Coroner ,recalling Holmes, told him that this was a terrible incident in his young life. The jury had seen that he was grossly distressed and thought that he would never forget the injury he had done to the poor girl, and he was now at liberty to go. He the Coroner need not say let it be a warning to him for he was sure he would never forget it as long as he lived.