

Melancholy Accident at Maiden Newton Mill

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Editor: *Warning – this article contains details which some readers may find upsetting. (I've been watching too much television!)*

An accident of a most distressing nature occurred in the Dorset village on 25 October 1858. A youth was crushed to death under an iron waterwheel. The subject of the melancholy catastrophe was Mr William Henry Cox, son of Mr Henry Cox of Maiden Newton brewery.

William, who was on a visit to his home for a few days holiday, was articled as a medical pupil to Messrs Curme & Good, Surgeons, of Dorchester, whom he had been with for about fifteen months, and was spoken of in the highest terms as an intelligent, promising, and an exceedingly well conducted youth.

On the evening in question William was paying a visit to the residence of Mr Swatridge, miller, of Maiden Newton. At about half past five he was in the garden with his brother and a son of Mr Swatridge, and in jocular manner he slapped the latter on his back, observing, "Now Dick, I have paid you what I owe you". He then ran from the garden, across a small plot of ground behind the mill, and it would appear that he attempted to cross the mill pond to get to the other side. There is no bridge or anything of the kind for the purpose of crossing from one bank to the other, but simply an iron grating about ten feet long to keep any substance from getting under the wheel, the top of the fence being only three or four inches wide. It is supposed that he endeavoured to walk along this narrow ledge immediately in front of the iron wheel which works the mill. After he had disappeared from the garden, young Mr Swatridge heard a grating noise, and immediately the mill stopped. It was inferred that the wheel had been damaged, and a messenger was dispatched to Beaminster for a millwright, no suspicion being entertained that a fatal accident had occurred.

The lengthened absence of the William, however, caused some misgiving, and upon further examination the horrible fact became apparent, that he had unfortunately fallen into the wheel and had been crushed to death beneath its ponderous weight. The mill was about seventeen horse-power, and the wheel usually rotates about eight times in a minute. There was little doubt that he had missed his footing while crossing over the top of the grating, fallen into the buckets or flanges of the undershot wheel, carried down one-quarter of revolution from the mark where he first came into contact with it, so that William must have been deprived of life in about two seconds. The water had been shut off immediately the mill stopped, but it was with considerable difficulty that the body was got out, the wheel having to be lifted right up. When recovered it was in a frightfully mutilated condition, the right leg being completely severed and torn away from his body, with the ligaments and part of the muscles of the thigh still attached. His skull was fractured into small bits, and the left leg and both arms broken. The crushing was so violent that eight iron girders, of considerable thickness, which formed part of the wheel, were broken.

On Wednesday an inquest was held upon the remains before H Lock Esq, Deputy Coroner, at the White Horse Inn where a verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.

Information from Sherborne Mercury, 9 November 1858