

Charles Cameron

Rushworth Chronicle

21 February, 1908

Shocking Drowning Fatality.

The Waranga Basin waters claimed their second victim on Sunday afternoon last when Master Charles Cameron, eldest son of Mr Chas. Cameron, butcher, of Rushworth, lost his life.

The circumstances attending the fatality are rendered all the more pathetic from the fact that it was deceased's sixteenth birthday, and it was on this account that he was allowed to go to the Basin in company with his brother to spend the afternoon. Proceeding to Langdon's point, they joined a picnicking party there. Before long one of the party lost his hat by its being blown into the water and the lad volunteered to regain it by swimming in.

Mr K. Corlass was present and he endeavoured to persuade him from doing so, but the boy maintained that he could swim and it was all right. Apparently Mr Corlass had his doubts, for he unlaced his boots and removed some of his clothes so as to be in readiness if assistance were required.

Cameron swam out to the hat right enough and obtained it, placing it in his mouth. He then turned round and commenced swimming for the shore, but when about a dozen yards away he called out to Mr Corlass that he had better come to him. He was making such good progress that Mr Corlass thought he must be funning. However, deceased almost immediately called out again and without delay Mr Corlass sprang in and struck out for the now apparently exhausted lad, who no doubt found himself incapable of reaching the shore. Before he could reach him, however, and when at a distance of only some eight feet from him, deceased sank like a stone and was seen no more.

Mr Corlass immediately dived but missed him and several further dives were also unsuccessful. Finally, assistance had to be rendered Mr Corlass, as he was so exhausted he would probably have shared the same fate.

Information was at once conveyed to the police and Senior-Constable O'Brien was promptly on the spot directing operations in the desire to recover the body. The only boat in the vicinity was the Government boat at the Waranga Bank, but operations wore considerably delayed by the unpardonable action of Mr Hickey, the person in charge of the maintenance works at the bank, who positively declined to let the boat go on the pretence that it was not fit. A considerable time was thus lost but eventually the police went and procured the boat, which was found to be in good order and capable of carrying eight or ten men. A couple of sailors, employed in the quarries, rendered good service on Sunday afternoon and evening in the endeavor to recover the body, and as they were expert hands with the boat, their services were again sought on the Monday morning, but it was only after considerable argument that Hickey was prevailed upon to let the men go.

In the circumstances it is hard to account for the stand taken by Hickey, and the friends and relatives of the deceased are naturally incensed at such callous indifference, which, fortunately, is only very rarely met with amongst men.

Dragging operations were resumed on Monday morning, and at nine o'clock success rewarded the efforts of the searchers, for one of the drags caught under the arm of deceased and he was brought to the surface.

From the appearance of the body it would appear that heart failure had caused deceased to sink, for the usual symptoms of death by drowning were absent.

An inquiry was opened on Monday but adjourned till Saturday after viewing the body. An order for interment was given and the funeral took place on Tuesday afternoon, when there was a very large attendance of sympathisers, while the Rushworth Adult and Junior Rechabite Lodges were strongly represented.

The Rushworth Brass Band, of which deceased was a member, headed the mournful procession, playing The Dead March.

The Rev. J. Weir conducted the funeral service, Bros. K. W. Sleep and E. O. Risstrom performing the lodge rites.

Deceased was a fine, well-developed, intelligent lad. He was of a cheerful disposition and exceptionally well mannered, and thus it was that he was a great favourite and everyone knew him.

The blow is a severe one for the parents, who only had the two boys, and sympathy is expressed for them on all hands.

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deceased replied, " If I can't bring it you bring me." He had no idea the water was so deep.

Hugh Fraser deposed that he was at the Basin in company with Mr Corlass and party on the 16th inst. Charlie Cameron, his brother and Jas. Spence arrived shortly afterwards. About ten or fifteen minutes afterwards, Mr Corlass' hat blow into the water and he asked his own son to strip and go in for it. It was about half a chain from the edge. He begged young Corlass not to go in as he knew the water was very deep. He advised both Mr and Mrs Corlass not to let the lad go in, but he did so and recovered the fishing line which Mr Corlass

had thrown in very easily. Charlie Cameron saw this and it made him anxious to get the hat. He (witness) advised him not to go in and Mr Corlass said "Now, Charlie, if you don't think yourself fit do not attempt it." Charlie said he could swim and told the ladies to go away over the hill. He then went in and seemed to swim very strongly going to the hat, which was about a chain out. He secured the hat and put it in his mouth and started to swim for the shore but did not seem to make much headway. He told Corlass to be ready to go out for him. Deceased had told Corlass to come out to him if anything happened. Mr Corlass sang out for deceased to put the hat on his head and when he took it out of his mouth he called out "I think you had better come out." Deceased said this quite coolly and did not seem distressed. Corlass immediately sprang in and almost reached deceased in a few bounds when the lad sank from sight. Deceased did not struggle at all. Mr Corlass dived several

times unsuccessfully and became much exhausted, calling for help. He tried to ride his horse in, he could not swim, but it would not face the water. Corlass seemed to collapse when a few yards from the edge and he (witness) had to rush in and pull him out or he also would have been drowned. Afterwards Corlass had to be prevented from going in again. Every effort was made to rescue the deceased.

Evidence was given by J. E. Cameron, Dugald Cameron and Senior-constable O'Brien as to subsequent dragging operations and the recovery of the body on the following morning, about half-past nine o'clock, in twelve feet of water close to where deceased had disappeared. The hands were folded across the chest.

A finding was arrived at that deceased had met his death by accidental drowning, and that no blame was attachable to anyone present.