

John Merryfull

Murchison Advertiser

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SHOOTING FATALITY

The townspeople of Rushworth were much alarmed on Friday morning last when it became known that a young man named John Merryfull, who resides with his mother a short distance from the town, had been missing since half past two o'clock the previous day.

The police, who had searched all Thursday night round the edge of the Basin, had found no trace of him, and it was feared that some calamity had overtaken him. No tidings had been obtained of him up to 11 o'clock in the morning when the firebell was rung and the services of more searchers were enlisted, and several parties scoured the bush in all directions.

It was not until about half-past four in the afternoon that any success attended their efforts, when Mr James Hutchison, who was one of Constable Scott's party, was horrified to see the body of Merryfull lying in a depression, near the Chinese camp in Main Gully, about a quarter of a mile from his home. Hutchison at once informed Senior-Constable O'Brien, and the body of deceased was conveyed to the police station.

Merryfull had been very low in spirits for some time and had evidently shot himself shortly after leaving home on Thursday afternoon. A gun, with one barrel recently discharged, was found under the body. A string had been attached to the trigger, which had apparently been pulled by deceased with his foot.

Death was instantaneous, and a note found in the waistcoat pocket proclaimed it a case of self-destruction.

The funeral took place on Sunday afternoon, when a large number followed the remains to the Rushworth cemetery.

The Rev. J. R. Walker conducted the funeral service, and Mr H. J. Brice the service of the Oddfellows' Lodge, of which Merryfull was a member. Mr G. Anderson had charge of the mortuary arrangements.

MAGISTERIAL INQUIRY.

An inquiry was held on Saturday, 6th inst, before Dr Heily, J.P., when the following evidence was taken.

James Hutchison stated that he was a miner residing in Rushworth; he identified the body as that of John Merryfull. He was searching for deceased and on Friday afternoon discovered the body in a trench near the Chinamen's camp. He immediately brought word to Senior-constable O'Brien, and together they brought the deceased to the police station. He had known him for about 11 years and had found him a quiet respectable lad. He found the gun lying underneath the body.

Elizabeth Merryfull deposed that John Merryfull was her son. She saw him last on Thursday at two o'clock. He took the gun and said he was going out wattle bird shooting. He seemed in rather low spirits for the last week. He was over 23 years of age. He had been a very good boy to her. He said he was going to take the old muzzle loading gun.

Ethel Ayers deposed that she knew the deceased. She saw him last Wednesday. She went to get some washing from his mother. He had a dirty shirt on and she told him to take it off. He stood thinking for a minute and then said, "What a life; I hope it won't be for much longer."

She then went out and did not see him again.

M. Drinan gave evidence as to deceased telling her about a month ago about his having pains in the back of the head.

Senior-constable O'Brien deposed that it was reported to him on Thursday night that the deceased was missing. He searched all the night and about half-past four o'clock on Friday afternoon the first witness informed him that he had found him. They drove to the locality in a buggy and found the body laying on its left side and a gun lying across the deceased's left arm, the stock was between his legs, and a piece of string, was fastened to the left hand barrel trigger. The string had been broken, and the other end was round the toe of his boot.

There was a gun-shot wound between his eyes, and a pool of blood on the ground. He had apparently placed the stock of the gun on the ground with his head over the muzzle. The deed was evidently done very deliberately, for he had placed his game bag and hat on the bank of the trench. He searched the body and found a note in the inside pocket of the waistcoat. It read thus, "Blame no one for this, it is my own folly; my head is on fire." The note was unsigned.

A verdict of death from a gun-shot wound, apparently self-inflicted, was returned, no evidence being given to indicate what state of mind the deceased was in at the time of his death.