

Mrs Helena Rowley

Bendigo Advertiser

15 May, 1901

SUDDEN DEATH. Rushworth 13th May.

A very sudden death happened to Mrs. Helena Rowley, the wife of a well-known resident, Mr. John Rowley, engine driver.

Mrs. Rowley, on Friday evening, about 5 o'clock, had her tea and was apparently in the best of health. Half-an-hour later the baker called and she went out and got the bread from him.

Later in the evening the husband returned and Mrs Rowley complained of not feeling well. Subsequently, she became so bad that Dr. Christie was called in and shortly afterwards she expired.

The matter was reported to the police, and Mr. H. Morrison, P.M., ordered a post-mortem examination.

The inquest was opened by Dr. J. V. Heily, J.P., and adjourned until Friday next.

Dr. Christie made the post-mortem examination. A portion of the contents of the stomach was removed and taken by the police to Melbourne for examination by the Government analyst (Mr. Hackett).

The funeral took place yesterday and was largely attended, being headed by the Rushworth Brass Band, and the local branch of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows, of which bodies the husband was a member.

Rushworth Chronicle

17 May, 1901

A very sudden death occurred at Rushworth on Friday evening last, Mrs Helena Rowley, wife of Mr John Rowley, dying after an illness of only two or three hours.

Mrs Rowley was apparently in her usual state of health at about five o'clock in the afternoon, as she was then talking to the baker and did not complain of being ill. Some time later her husband, who is an engine-driver in the employ of Mr W. Skate, returned home from his work and Mrs Rowley informed him that she felt very ill. Recognising that she was indeed seriously ill, her husband lost no time in securing the attendance of Dr Christie, who did everything possible in order to alleviate her sufferings. Medical skill, however, was of no avail, and she gradually sank and died some few hours later.

Unable to state definitely the cause of death, Dr Christie made a post-mortem examination the following day, and, failing to find anything which would be likely to cause death so suddenly, he removed portion of the contents of deceased's stomach for treatment by Mr Blackett, the Government Analyst. Under the circumstances an inquest was considered necessary in order to take evidence and, if possible, determine the cause of death.

In the meantime Mr Morrison, the coroner, had been communicated with and that gentleman requested the police to refer the matter to one of the local justices and hold the inquiry. A Jury of five was empanelled, with Dr Heily on the bench, and the inquiry opened. Having viewed the body in company with the jury, Dr Heily gave an order for its interment and on the application of the police adjourned the inquiry until this (Friday) morning, at ten o'clock.

The remains were interred in the Rushworth cemetery on Sunday afternoon, a large number of people paying the last tribute of respect to deceased by joining in the funeral cortege, which was headed by the Rushworth Brass Band (playing the Dead March) and some twenty Oddfellows, the husband of deceased being a member of both these bodies.

Mr Anderson was the undertaker, Mr R. May officiating at the grave.

Much sympathy is felt by the residents for Mr Rowley and his family of five children in their untimely bereavement.

The Rushworth contingent of the Victorian Mounted Rifles returned from the Commonwealth celebrations on Sunday last. Just as the funeral procession following Mrs Rowley's remains to the place of interment came down the street, the Mounted contingent were about to sweep round the post-office into High-street. Observing the funeral, however, the order was given to form into line and remain at the salute while the funeral passed. The men, who numbered some fifteen, were all splendidly mounted, and presented a fine well-trained appearance.

The inquest as to the cause of death of the late Mrs Rowley was further adjourned for one week on Friday morning last, no word having been received from the Government analyst as to the result of his analysis. Since then, however, Constable Ryan has received the analyst's report, intimating that he had failed to find any traces of poison in the portion analysed by him.

The inquiry will be resumed at ten o'clock this morning.

**Rushworth Chronicle
1901**

31 May,

CORONIAL INQUIRY.

The inquiry touching the death of Mrs Rowley was continued at the Court-house, Rushworth, on Friday last. Dr Heily (deputy coroner) presided. The following jury were empanelled: — Messrs E. A. Muhlhan (chairman), E Coyle, E. Cazanave, A. Lambden and J. Potter.

John Rowley deposed that he was an engine-driver residing at Nuggetty Gully, Rushworth, and the husband of Helena Rowley. He remembered the 10th of May. On the morning of that day he went to work at the sawmill at about 8 am. His wife was at home when he left. She said she felt very well. She had not been very well and that was the reason why he asked her. He returned for dinner about 12.15. His wife was then quite jolly. His dinner was prepared as usual. His wife partook of it with him.

He left again about one o'clock. His wife was then first-rate. He again returned about 6.15 in the evening. His wife was then lying on the bed. She spoke first. She said, "Oh, Johnny, I am bad." He asked what was the matter. She said she had pains in her head and back and was bad all over. Only the two children were in the house when he returned. He told his boy, Robert, to run for the doctor. Dr Christie came. He also sent for Mrs Webb, a neighbour.

When he returned to his wife after he had sent for the doctor she said, "Oh, Johnny, I am bad," and went off insensible. She had been suffering with her head (off and on) for 13 or 14 years. About 15 years ago, in getting out of bed, she fell and stuck a hairpin in the back of her head and he had to pull it out with his teeth. That was about 15 years ago. Dr Christie arrived about 6.45. The doctor and himself tried to get her to take something but she could not swallow.

She remained in that state till one o'clock next morning, when she died. Dr Christie was there about ten o'clock and he then told him he did not think there were any hopes.

To the Foreman—He did not tell Dr Christie about the hairpin.

To Dr Heily—He had not the slightest idea that she would touch or take the cyanide. They were always on the best of terms.

To Mr Draper—The bottle of cyanide had not been interfered with during that day. His wife was 49 years of age. She had had thirteen children and five are living. The youngest was nine years of age. There had not been any mushrooms in the house for days.

Louisa Webb deposed that she knew the deceased, Mrs Rowley. She remembered the 10th inst. On that day Lily Rowley said her mother was very ill. She went over and found Mrs Rowley unconscious in a back room. She was lying on a bed and was groaning very much. She assisted Mr Rowley to put her to bed. Under the doctor's recommendation she put hot fomentations to her stomach. These did not do any good. She vomited and threw up some black stuff. She had known Mrs Rowley for some time. Her only complaint was that her head was bad. She never threatened to do away with herself. She always appeared to be happy. Witness never attended her before.

To the Jury—The Rowley's lived happily together. She had known them for six years.

To the Coroner—The fluid came up with a retch. There was a little froth before the vomit. There were no spasms when she retched.

F. Robinson deposed that he was a driver for Mr Brown, baker. He called at Mr Rowley's place about 5.30 p.m. on the 10th May. Mrs Rowley took some bread and appeared to be in her usual health.

Robert Rowley deposed that he remembered the 10th of May. During the afternoon his mother was laughing and talking about one thing and another. He afterwards went away and when he returned she was lying on the bed and told him she was ill. She said she had pains in and all round her head.

Charles Christie deposed that he was a duly qualified medical practitioner residing at Rushworth. On the 10th inst. he was called to see Mrs Rowley about 6 p.m. on that day. He found her unconscious. From inquiries he found that her illness had commenced suddenly about 5.45 the same evening. From the symptoms shown by the patient he considered she was either suffering from poisoning or from blood pressure on the brain. The breathing was stertorous and irregular. Froth was around the mouth and at times dark grumous matter was vomited. Convulsions occurred at intervals. The pupils of the eyes were contracted and insensible to light.

He tried to administer remedies by the mouth but she was unable to swallow them. The surface of the body was cold and clammy. The deceased never rallied, but sank and died about one o'clock in the morning. In consequence of his suspicions of poison he was unable to give a death certificate. On the afternoon of the 11th he made a post-mortem examination of the body. He found no external marks of violence. He found one side of the heart full of thick blood and the other side empty. All the other organs were healthy. He examined the brain and found at its base some thick clotted blood. He also opened the stomach and placed some of its contents in a jar for analysis, and he was not fully satisfied that the clots at the base of the brain had caused death.

The inside of the stomach presented a natural appearance, with no signs of corrosion, but he thought he detected a smell of prussic acid in the contents of the stomach.

The presence of the clots found at the base of the brain might have produced death. The membrane covering the brain was adherent in parts to the membrane immediately covering it.

The contents of the stomach had been analysed and a telegram received from the Government analyst stating that no trace of poison had been found. The vomited matter was the same as that contained in the stomach. A bottle of cyanide was shown him but it was covered with dust and apparently had not been opened for a long time.

Constable Ryan deposed that he received two bottles and handed them to Mr Blacken, the Government analytical chemist, Melbourne.

He had received a telegram from that gentleman stating that there was not any trace of poison in the bottle containing the stuff sent for analysis.

Dr Heily said that Dr Christie had been quite justified, from the symptoms, in assuming that death had been caused by cyanide poisoning, but from the post-mortem examination it was quite plain that death was the result of an attack of apoplexy. He would suggest to the jury that their verdict should be that deceased had died from the bursting of a blood vessel at the base of the brain. There was no evidence to support the supposition that she had taken poison and there was nothing in any of her previous actions to suggest that she had any desire to commit suicide.

The jury returned a verdict that the death was the result of natural causes, and that there was not the slightest suspicion that poison had been used.