THE LATE FATAL POWDER-MILL EXPLOSION.

CORONERS' INQUEST.

Yesterday a jury was empannelled before Mr. W. Carter, the coroner for the eastern division, at the Eight Bells, West Greenwich, on the body of William Hughes and William Mitchell, whose deaths in consequence of the injuries received in the blowing up of a powder-mill at that place, and belonging to Sir Henry Bridges, on which they were at work.

The jury having been sworn, they proceeded to view the building, and found a most dreadfully appearance. Not a feature was discernible, the issue of each presenting merely the appearance of a creviced and blackened mass of flame.

The following evidence was taken:

Elizabeth Humphrey, deposed that she was called upon on Wednesday last to attend upon the deceased William Hughes, who she understood had been injured by the blowing up of a powder-mill. Witness remained with him until his death on Friday morning at a quarter past five o'clock. The deceased was attended by Mr. Stillwell. He appeared to be sensible, but all he said was that he had been blown up and lost his money. This he said several times. He never gave any information as to how the explosion took place, or blamed any person as being the cause of it.

Mr. Charles Stillwell, surgeon, of Ewell, deposed that he was called to attend the deceased William Hughes. He first saw him at the place where the accident happened. He was supported by four men. Witness examined him, and directed him to be removed to that house where he was afterwards, and more a more critical account. Witness examined him, and found that his hands, face, and arms, were very severely burnt. He was perfectly sensible, and asked him how the accident occurred, and who was to blame for it; he, and his father were in the act of putting an iron ring on the spindle of the mill wheel when the explosion took place.

The Coroner inquired what the state of the deceased was? Mr. Stillwell replied that he was in a very dangerous state. He was not at present aware that he was dead, and he had not expected that if he were informed of the fact, or questioned upon the subject, he would kill him.

The Coroner said, that as this was the case, it would not be necessary to inquire any inquiries of the deceased.

James Baker, a labourer employed upon the works, deposed that he had known William Mitchell, the other deceased person, and proved that the body the jury had before them was his. Mr. Joseph Ward, another medical gentleman, proved that he was called on to see Mitchell after the accident, and described the injuries he had sustained. He was examined by witness, and witness asked him if he knew how the accident happened, and he said he did not. He was in such a state that if he had been asked to describe the occurrence he had taken place, he could not have told the particulars, and witness had no doubt he believed it to have arisen accidentally.

Henry Trencher deposed that he was in the service of Sir Henry Bridges, and was employed in the powder-mill. The corning house was a place where the powder was taken as green charge, and before it was put to the stock. The corning-house was not made use of for six months before this time, and the works were undergoing repairs, and the demolished, Bridge, and his father, who were millwrights, were repairing them. When the explosion took place, witness was engaged upon the premises in mending sieves. The first thing he heard was a sudden cracking noise, which was immediately followed by a loud explosion, and witness thought that he, and the house he was in, were lifted off the ground. He looked out and saw that the building where the deceased persons had been at work, was level with the ground, and the walls had been forced down, and some portion of them carried a considerable distance. He immediately ran to the spot, and the first person he saw was the elder Bridge, he was coming to get off. The clothes were on fire. Another of the men was calling out "For God's sake, help me." He went on further into the building, and there saw the millwright and his son, Mitchell, in the midst of the burning amongst the wheels, jammed in such a position that he could not get out. Witness assisted him out. He was very much burnt. He had his clothes on fire, and witness assisted in taking them off and carrying him home. Mitchell had on the usual powder dress. Witness afterwards saw the younger Bridge in the set of walking a way from the building. He appeared to be burnt a good deal in the face and hands, and was cut on the eye. He was afterwards conveyed to the Eight Bells, where he died. The two Bridges were the persons who put some iron hoops on the wheel of the mill. Witness heard them say they should be obliged to put the hoops on hot, and if they were not they would be put on the side of the corning house for the purpose of heating the hoops. The fire was made of coal on the ground, and they did not notice that there was anything to keep the hoops hot. In witness's opinion the fire was about twenty yards from the building, and it was nearest to the wall of the house. The other side of the building were the milled houses, and there they believed the millwright, and one or two of the four hoops which were to have been put on the wheels before the accident happened. Witness asked the elder Bridge if he could account for the accident, and he said he could not, unless it was by a scale falling from the iron hoop they were working upon, or else by the lightning. There was a storm in the neighbourhood about that time; he heard thunder, but did not notice lightning. There was some grain powder in the corning-house, but not so much as a hundredweight. There were two barrels which contained powder, but there was not more than enough to fill one barrel. There might have been a hundred weight altogether. There was some dust powder in this corning-house. Dust powder was the refuse, which required to be re-worked in the mill, but it was suitable. The witness was being questioned by the Coroner, and there might have been as much as two hundred weight of this dust powder. The building in question had been up for years, but they did not work it in more than three months during the year. The process of corning the powder caused a great deal of dust which, of course, collected on the floor. The deceased and his son, Mitchell, had no doubt been occasioned by the corning powder. It was usual to leave powder in the corning-house, but generally it was removed to the magazine.

It was here explained to the Coroner and the Jury that some of the powder in the corning-house was in a finished state, but required to pass once more through the mill. Examinations could not find any reason to believe that the occurrence took place otherwise than accidentally. The deceased, Mitchell, had on his "black" dress, which was very inflammable, and if he was surrounded by powder, his clothes might have caught fire, and they would have burnt very rapidly, and might have thus occasioned the accident. Did not think that a scale from the hoop the deceased person was working on could have caused the mischief.

Mr. Gardner, the surgeon of Sir Henry Bridges, explained that iron, at a black heat, would not ignite gunpowder.

By the jury: Witness had no orders to remove the powder. He did not think there was any danger in allowing it to remain where it was.

A juror said he had been informed that the witness had received positive directions to remove the powder.

The witness denied that this was the case.

By the Coroner: Did you place near the spot to enable the millwrights to wet the premises for their own safety? Witness cleared out the corning-house to make it more secure before the men came. The work had been all dust from the wall and the floor, and took all the pains i.e. could get out all he could, and placed it in the tins where it remained till the explosion took place. The millwrights made their fire where they were standing when the wind blew from a direction right into the building.

Mr. Gardner was then questioned on his belief as to the origin of the fire, and he expressed his opinion to be that it had been occasioned by lightning. He said that it might also have been occasioned by the fire that was used to heat the iron; but he considered it not at all probable that the hoops could have caused the mischief, because they must have been too cold at the time.

Mr. Lipscombe, the landlord of the Eight Bells, deposed that he carried some beard to the corning-house for the use of the Bridges and Mitchell just before the accident happened. The former were at work at the wheel. He observed a large fire, in which they were burning the hoops, and he said he could not put them on unless they were red hot, and witness remarked that he should have been afraid to use them in such a place. Since the accident the elder Bridge had told him that he was not aware there was any powder in the corning-house. He had not left the mill more than five minutes when the explosion took place. In his opinion the accident was occasioned by a spark from the fire.

This being the whole of the evidence, the Coroner briefly addressed the jury, who returned a verdict that the deceased persons were burnt to death in a powder-mill, which had accidentally exploded.