



In Dunedin's Southern cemetery is a new grave marker recording the deaths of two boys in what is a chilling replica of the tragedy at Ross & Glendining's dam some ten years before involving the Thompson children.

In an attempt to rescue their brother, James [James Alexander 14 years in DCC burial records] and Arthur Duncan [Alfred John 13 years in DCC burial records], age 15 and 14 respectively, sons of Mr W. Duncan, the well-known footballer, were drowned in the freezing works dam at Burnside yesterday afternoon, 17 April 1927.

The two boys, with two other brothers, were playing near the dam early in the afternoon, when the youngest fell in. James Mehalski, aged 14, immediately dived in to rescue him and brought him to the bank, but the sides were so steep that the drowning boy could be brought no further to safety. The other three Duncan boys then jumped into the dam to give assistance, and they too got into difficulties. Another boy named James Fell, aged about 12 years, who had a raft on the dam, came to their rescue, but it capsized, and fell was thrown into the water. He swam to the bank, however

and scrambled out, pulling Mehalski out by passing him a long stick. Though Mehalski was almost in a state of collapse, the pair ran for assistance, and as a result two of the Duncan boys were rescued.

The home of the Duncan boys is at Lindsay Street, Caversham. The body of one of the boys was recovered at 4.30, but the other was not discovered until 7.30. An inquest will be opened at the Morgue today.

The inquest was held by Mr J R Bartholomew, SM, as Coroner on Wednesday afternoon at the Morgue. The police were represented by Constable Hamilton of Green Island.

James Lindsay Mehalski outlined his experience of the tragedy and confirmed that boys often went there for a swim, no one had ever stopped them from going to the dam, and there was no notice not to go there.

Constable Hamilton and found two other constables and Drs Murray and Greenslade already there. A boat was obtained from the reservoir and dragging continued until 7.30 p.m. The dam was very shallow in one place, but it was not a safe place to learn to swim. The fence was right on the edge and had only 4 or 5 plain wires. A lot of boys went swimming there.

The Coroner said that this was a particularly sad fatality, and one could only express sympathy with the parents. The statements of the boys showed that everything possible had been done to rescue the little chaps, and the boys were entitled to every commendation. The one thing that had struck him about the place was that it might be something in the nature of a trap for boys, and the evidence showed that it must be quite a dangerous place for boys left alone. That was a matter he would make some recommendations about to the management, and he would see if the place could be made safe. The dam owing to its being convenient to Dunedin, was just the place boys would frequent and thereby run a serious risk.

The verdict would be that death was due to accidental drowning.

Rather strange that no one from the freezing works was brought before the Coroner. This could have been a far worse tragedy, the other four boys very nearly have perished too.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from reports in the Otago Witness.