



CORONER'S INQUEST.

An inquiry into the death of **William Edward Street** was held at the residence of Mr W. P. **Street**, Duke **street**, yesterday afternoon, before Dr Hocken and a jury of 12.

The Coroner, in charging the jury, said that he thought this was a case which they would find one of purely accidental death by shooting. Whilst it was no doubt advisable that the youths of this country should as early as possible become conversant with the use of firearms, it behoved them to be specially careful in that use.

John Campbell Morris, accountant, deposed that the deceased was his nephew, and would have been 15 years of age on the 24th of January next. He had been once or twice out with a gun during the last 12 months, and that was about all his experience of firearms.

Henry Baron, a lad living with his parents at Roslyn, deposed that he, the deceased, John Hawkes, and James Thomson went out to Saddle Hill on Saturday morning to shoot rabbits. Witness had a single-barrelled, and Hawkes a double-barrelled gun. They inspected the mining works, went up the hill for a few hours, and shot some birds, and at about 1 o'clock returned to a hut near the battery and had lunch. Witness let the deceased have one or two shots with his gun, and he also let Thomson have one. After lunch in Mr Hawkes' cottage they went round the mine again until the train arrived from Dunedin.

When the train arrived, Hawkes took some money up to the hut for his father, in order to look after it, and the other three boys, after visiting some other parts of the mine, joined him there. Hawkes then locked the door, as witness told him that his father (Mr Hawkes) had been angry at seeing him talking to a strange boy at the door a few minutes before. Inside the hut, Hawkes then began to tell them about a former occasion on which he had been left there in charge of money, and had quitted the place for a few minutes. On that occasion Mr Fitchett had complained of it, and said that anyone might have come through the window and taken the money.

Witness thereupon took up the bag in fun, and said, "I am going to collar the money." Hawkes then took up his gun from the corner and brought one of the barrels to either half or full cock, and was going to present it at the window. He said, "suppose anyone were to come in at the window and try to take it now." Witness' shoulder was near the window, and thinking it might be dangerous, he jumped off his seat to within about a yard of young **Street**. He said to Hawkes, "You had better put down the hammer, or there will be an accident with that gun." Hawkes then brought the gun down in a half-circle to lower the hammer, not noticing that by doing so it covered **Street**. Hawkes was only looking at the lock of the gun, and his forefinger somehow slipped off the hammer, and the charge went into **Street's** head. The gun was loaded with either No. 2 or No. 4 shot. Just before the accident **Street** was laughing at witness for jumping away, and said, "How frightened you are of a gun, Harry." Almost immediately the charge exploded, and witness saw the side of his head blown away. He went upwards for one moment, and- then his knees gave way, and he fell, throwing up one arm over his head.

Hawkes ran back across the room and put down his gun, and witness said, "You had better unlock the door and run to your father." He tried to do so, but was so nervous and shivering that he could not put the key into the keyhole, and Thomson did it. Dr Coughtrey and Dr Fletcher came together, and witness asked the former if Street was alive, saying he had seen him move. Dr Coughtrey said no, he was dead. Hawkes seemed very horrified after the accident, and said something about killing his cousin.

The Coroner: There was some amount of carelessness, I suppose.

Witness: Well, he was not looking towards **Street** at the time, and did not know the gun was covering him. John Hawkes, aged 16, confirmed the evidence of the last witness as to what preceded the accident. He had put the gun at half-cock, and was trying to put the hammer down when the trigger slipped from under his thumb. Witness had practised a good deal with a rifle, and had been out rabbit-shooting three times before.

The Coroner said that was the whole of the evidence. He supposed the jury would have no difficulty in concluding that the occurrence was the result of pure accident.

The Jury at once brought in a verdict of "Accidental death," but debated amongst themselves for some time as to the advisability of adding a rider with regard to the use of firearms by young children. The ages mentioned during the discussion were, however, very much below that of any of the lads concerned in this affair. Eventually a rider was added to the effect that care should be exercised in allowing young boys out with firearms.

William Edward Street is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery, the headstone saying "accidentally shot".

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand
(www.cemeteries.org.nz) from Paperspast website, Otago Daily Times, Issue 6809, 11 December 1883, Page 3